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laser projector
Samsung Q7F TV
Monitor Audio
Silver 500 5.1
Sony 4K BD player
Roku streamer
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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: February 22, 2018



New year, new tech:
CES report, p18

Welcome

In the consumer electronics world, every New Year begins with CES – the Las Vegas-based technology expo that seems to get bigger and more outlandish each time. Attendees in early January could witness roll-up OLED screens and a new Sony robot dog, amongst other fantastical inventions.

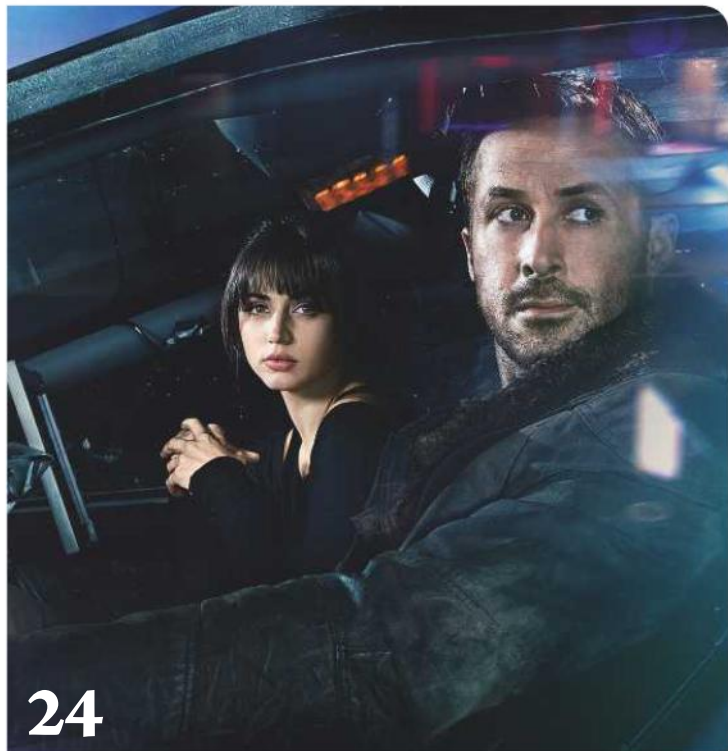


Amidst all these headline-grabbing tech concepts are genuine products due to hit stores later this year, and one trend interested me in particular – the wider adoption of full array local dimming (FALD) LED backlights on LCD sets. **This is perhaps not as likely to inspire consumers as AI-infused 8K panels**, but is obviously beneficial in picture performance terms for the sorts of TVs that shoppers turn to if an OLED display is out of their price range. The latter technology changed the TV landscape in 2018 – this year traditional LCD is fighting back.

Mark Craven
Editor



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The UK's most experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



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Film producer and post-production expert delves deep into Hollywood and AV



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Industry veteran and former Editor of UK CE trade journal ERT



Danny Phillips:
A former editor of *What Video* magazine, now a certified home cinema audio buff

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BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** SVS 4000 Series unleashes sealed, ported and cylinder subs
DAMSON AUDIO Wireless, compact Atmos package hits UK **4K RECORDING** BDA adds archiving to UHD spec **CES 2018** From monster TVs to short-throw 4K projectors **NEWS X10** The hottest news stories in bite-sized chunks **JIGSAW** Franchise returns for UHD Blu-ray scares **& MORE!**

4K for all

Vivitek HK2288 → www.karma-av.co.uk



Shoppers for 4K DLP projectors have a new model to consider in the shape of Vivitek's £2,500 HK2288. This compact single-chip design offers HDR10 playback, a claimed 2,000 Lumens brightness, and a throw ratio of 1.39-2.09:1 through its 1.5x zoom. Additional setup flexibility comes via vertical lens shift, gamma and colour management tools and the PJ's trio of HDMI 2.0 inputs. It's available now, in black and white finishes.

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Choose your weapon!

SVS 4000 Series → www.svsound.com

Now lurking menacingly at an AV dealer near you are SVS's latest home cinema subwoofers. The 4000 Series arrives in sealed, ported and cylinder enclosures (pictured, left to right), with 13.5in high-excursion drivers and 1,200W RMS Class D amplifiers employed across the trio. Technology and design has trickled down from the brand's award-winning 16-Ultra series, including SVS's control/EQ app for in-room tuning. Pricing is £1,800 (SB-4000), £2,250 (PB-4000) and £2,000 (PC-4000).



Cambridge speaker goes large



Cambridge Audio has rounded out its Yoyo range of wireless speakers with the Yoyo L. The largest model

in the lineup, and selling now for around £350, this grey cloth-wrapped speaker features full-range drivers and subwoofer units in its front, left and right sides, with performance polished via Waves Maxx Audio DSP. Physical inputs include HDMI ARC, 3.5mm and optical digital audio; Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, Spotify Connect and Chromecast Built-In are on the streaming spec sheet. www.cambridgeaudio.com

Cans close in on premium sonics



Acknowledging that 'audiophile headphones usually require an open-back design,' Sennheiser has instead launched its closed-back HD 820 cans. Set to sell for €2,400 this Summer, this premium pair features Gorilla Glass-covered earcups,

promising to limit noise dispersion while retaining a 'realistic and natural soundfield.' Handcrafted micro-fibre earpads, Ring Radiator transducers and a balanced XLR connection complete the high-end feel. www.sennheiser.com

Recordable 4K incoming

Yes, you will be able to archive UHD TV broadcasts... if you live in Japan

The Blu-ray Disc Association has confirmed that a recordable version of the 4K Blu-ray format is in development. The specification has been ratified, and the new format will be available for licensing during 2018.

The next-generation broadcast-recordable Blu-ray Disc format will be launched in the Japanese market, in time for users to record and archive the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games in UHD resolution.

Japan has always been a stronghold for physical media and recordable discs, where Blu-ray recorders have always outsold standalone players and still represent almost 75 per cent of the Japanese Blu-ray hardware market.

The format is designed to support off-air recording of UHD broadcasts, including HLG HDR. It's also expected to be backwards-compatible with existing 4K and 2K discs.

The BDA says it is working with industry leaders to develop 'the tools' to ensure interoperability between recorders, players and software. Victor Matsuda, Chair of the BDA Global Promotions Committee, describes the development as a logical extension



Victor Matsuda: 'The ability to expand to keep up with consumer demand remains one of Blu-ray's greatest strengths'

of the format. 'With 4K becoming the standard, not only for TVs, but also mobile devices and video cameras, extending recordable

Blu-ray to enable Ultra HD content is a very practical. The ability to continually expand to keep up with consumer demand for high-quality experiences remains one of Blu-ray's greatest strengths – and a primary reason for its success and longevity.'

Perfect for Panasonic?

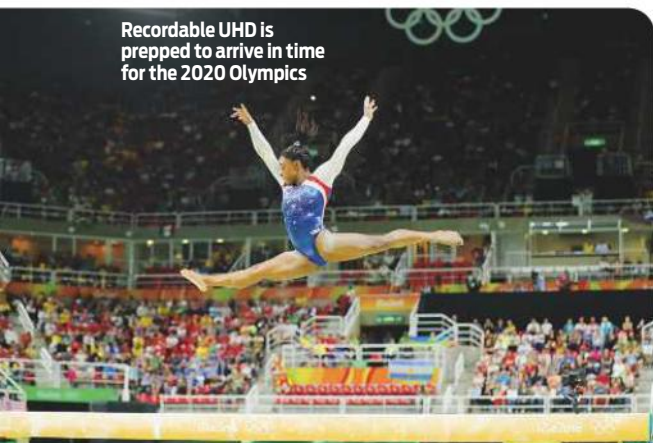
As yet there have been no official announcements of hardware support, but we think it's a given that Panasonic will be first out of the blocks with a UHD Blu-ray recorder. The company has pioneered the category since the launch of Blu-ray, and is a long-time sponsor of the Olympics, which in 2020 will be broadcast in UHD by NHK.

Speaking exclusively to *HCC*, Panasonic chief engineer Kazuhiko Kouno declared the development 'great news,' but conceded there was little specific detail he could release. 'We are positive for recordable UHD Blu-ray, but unfortunately I can't say anything about our product plan at the moment...'

The format will use existing Blu-ray blank media – current BD-R/RE discs (25/50/100GB) all suit the new recordable specification. The physical specification for these discs remains unchanged.

For 4K TV broadcasts, a bit rate of about 35Mbps is anticipated. Current BD-R/RE disc have 2x speed (72Mbps), which makes them compatible. When it comes to 8K broadcasts for the Japanese market, the anticipated bitrate will be about 100Mbps. To archive this requires a 4x speed (144Mbps) recording speed, which is only supported by BD-R discs (and not BD-RE).

Recordable UHD is prepped to arrive in time for the 2020 Olympics



OLYMPIC IMAGE: LEONARD ZHUKOVSKY/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Playlist...

Team *HCC* spins up its disc picks of the month

Westworld: Season One – The Maze (Ultra HD BD)

This 4K release might not offer much of a visual upgrade over the Full HD encodes, but it's the only way to enjoy this superb show with Atmos audio.



American Made (All-region BD)



Get high on home cinema sonics with this stylish and funny drug smuggling drama's sensational DTS:X soundtrack.

The Big Sleep (All-region BD)



After years of waiting, this classic film noir is finally available on BD in the UK (as a HMV exclusive), and we just can't get enough of it.

The Battle of Algiers (Region B BD)



Gillo Pontecorvo's award-winning 1966 war film returns to Blu-ray with a stunning 4K restoration.

Zombie Creeping Flesh (Region B BD)



Bruno Mattei's enjoyably ludicrous 1980 splatter flick looks better than ever on 88 Films' HD platter.

At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?
Catch these this month

Early Man

January 26: Nick Park returns to the director's chair for the first time since 2008's *Wallace & Gromit: A Matter of Loaf and Death* to helm this stop-motion comedy about a plucky caveman battling to save his tribe from the mighty forces of the Bronze Age.

Black Panther

February 12: Having made his debut in *Captain America: Civil War*, Wakandan ruler and part-time superhero King T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) gets his very own solo MCU movie.

The Shape of Water

February 14: Fresh from winning the top prize at the Venice Film Festival, Guillermo del Toro's dark fantasy about the relationship that develops between a mute woman and a mysterious sea creature gets a Valentine's Day cinema release in the UK.

Star Wars rules box office

The Last Jedi snatches top spot for 2017, despite opening in mid-December



Disney has claimed the highest grossing film of the year in the key US market for the third time in a row. And, as was the case in 2016 and 2015, it was helped by adventures in a galaxy far, far away...

Star Wars: The Last Jedi, released on December 15, pinched top spot from *Beauty and the Beast* (another Disney title). The sci-fi sequel had culled over \$530m by Jan 1, a shade over Summer flick *Beauty and the Beast*'s lifetime gross of \$504m. Previously, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016) and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2017) had seized the annual box office crown, again with December openings.

Yet the latest *Star Wars* film isn't destined to overhaul *The Force Awakens* as the franchise's most successful entry. Although it remains on release, the \$930m tally of J.J. Abrams' trilogy opener is far off. This drop-off in popularity was probably to be expected, however, judging from the mixed reaction to the film.

When it comes to worldwide records, 2009's *Avatar* still remains king, with a total gross of more than £2.8bn. Yet 2017 has proved a solid year for cinemas in light of continued growth in domestic streaming, and can already count one film (*Beauty and the*

Beast) on the all-time worldwide top ten. *The Last Jedi* may well eventually join it.

Howling success

The rest of 2017's box office big hitters are mainly the usual suspects (Marvel and DC capers, horror hit *IT*), but one movie in particular illustrates the changing nature of commercial cinema.

Wolf Warrior 2 is a flick you may well not have heard of – a Chinese action sequel following the exploits of a special ops soldier. But it has become the highest grossing Chinese-made movie ever, earning \$854m in its homeland; a figure big enough to push it beyond *Guardians of the Galaxy: Vol 2* and *Wonder Woman* in the global end-of-year tally.

Similarly, success in Asian markets has given movies that underperformed in the US a second-life. *Transformers: The Last Knight*, *Kong: Skull Island*, *The Great Wall* and *xXx: The Return of Xander Cage* all earned more in China than the US – the latter topping up a lowly \$44m US gross with \$164m of ticket sales in China.

It would seem the era of a film (or franchise) living or dying on its US performance is over...



Sony thinks small with HT-SF200

2.1-channel soundbar wants to hide in your living room

While Sony isn't afraid to make room-filling 100in TVs (see page 48), it also knows some shoppers demand tech that doesn't dominate a space. Enter its new HT-SF200 soundbar, designed to slot easily into a living room/bedroom setup courtesy of its 58(w) x 6.4(h) x 9.5(d)cm dimensions.

A 2.1-channel design, the HT-SF200 claims a modest onboard power of 80W spread across its stereo driver array and integrated, down-firing, side-ported subwoofer.

Aiming to bolster its sonic appeal is S-Force PRO Front Surround virtual processing. Preset

modes are offered for late-night listening and a dialogue boost.

Connections include an HDMI ARC, while Bluetooth hookup with compatible TVs delivers a cable-free solution. Bluetooth can also be used to stream content directly to the 'bar; there's also a USB port for music playback (WAV, MP3 and WMA formats are supported).

Sony says the HT-SF200 will arrive in Spring 2018 in white or black finishes – both with a leather-look top-plate. www.sony.co.uk

In place of separate subwoofer, the compact HT-SF200 uses a down-firing bass driver





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Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

Twin Peaks: The Final Dossier



If last year's *Twin Peaks* revival left you scratching your head, then series co-creator

Mark Frost's latest tie-in may have the answers. Presented as an FBI case file, it fills in the blanks for several characters who appeared in the 2017 show – as well as some of those who didn't return. Need to know how Annie is doing after her visit to the Black Lodge, or just who it was that swallowed that hybrid frog-fly thing? Then you're in luck. Pick up a copy for £17.

Erik the Conqueror OST



Roberto Nicolosi's score for Mario Bava's 1961 Viking epic gets its very first vinyl outing courtesy of Arrow Records. Newly mastered from the original analogue tapes across two translucent yellow 180g platters, this £30 limited edition double-album also boasts new sleeve art by fan-favourite Graham Humphreys.

Black Panther: The Ultimate Visual Guide



There's still time to brush up on the Warrior King of Wakanda, with this new guide

from publisher DK, ahead of seeing his solo movie that's out February 12. The £17 price tag gets you a potted history of Black Panther's exploits, including major storylines and characters, illustrated with art from the original comics and given a foreword by Marvel scribe Don McGregor.

Plum job for audio fans

Damson's compact system aims to give Atmos real mainstream appeal

Damson Audio CEO James Talbot is undeniably excited about his S-Series audio system, which aims to bring Dolby Atmos to the masses. He even claims that the prototype unit changed his viewing habits: 'What has Atmos done for me, in terms of watching movies? I've gone back to good old-fashioned physical media.'

Due to arrive early 2018, the S-Series lineup consists of an expandable soundbar with plug-in Atmos speaker module, a subwoofer and a pair of surround satellites. It's compatible with Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks, as well as Atmos; Dolby Virtual Surround is supported, too. 'We've been fortunate enough to have had a very close involvement with the Dolby development team,' Talbot reveals.

The S-Woofer subwoofer is the hub of the system and provides connectivity to the outside world. Two HDMI inputs and one HDMI output (with ARC) are available, and you also get Bluetooth plus a 3.5mm stereo jack for analogue sources. Other than that, Talbot explains with pride, 'everything's connected wirelessly.' The S-Bar soundbar (which contains the front left/right/centre speakers, and provides docking for the upwards-firing S-Atmos module), and the two S-Cube satellites, connect to the S-Woofer using a proprietary wireless technology that Damson has christened JetStreamNet.

This, Talbot explains, is not Bluetooth or 2.4GHz. 'We've deliberately optimised it for specific 5GHz frequencies outside the range of the dual-band routers. We've tested it in dense apartment-block Wi-Fi areas to ensure wireless dropouts aren't a problem.' He assures us that JetStreamNet won't clash with Sky Q client boxes.

Inputs are selected by a very simple remote, the only other function of which is volume adjustment. The S-Series doesn't ship with a calibration mic of the sort familiar to AVR owners, and won't even generate onscreen graphics. Setup is instead achieved automatically through the subwoofer's silicon. 'The system,' says Talbot, 'knows exactly how many speakers are connected to it... the subwoofer



James Talbot: 'The flexibility of the system and the modular approach we've taken is what allows us to be so creative'

determines where the surround sound speakers are positioned, and how far away they are, in order to set the levels.'

Talbot believes that configuring multichannel audio can be quite challenging for mainstream consumers. 'Removing the obstacles and challenges for setting this up at home is a big factor for us.'

The S-Woofer and S-Bar/S-Atmos are not totally wireless and still need to be connected to mains power supplies. So too do the S-Cubes – to a point. Buried within are rechargeable batteries capable of sustaining them for around eight hours ('so you've got at least an evening's worth of viewing').

Talbot is certain that wireless connection is all-important. 'I can't have conventional surround sound speakers because (a) the cables are trailing and (b) the kids are going to knock the stands over, and the speakers are going to go flying.' There's another practical advantage to Damson's concept: 'Being able to get out the satellite speakers only when I'm watching content I want to enjoy in surround is a great convenience.'

A modular approach

When the S-Series was demonstrated, in our case at Dolby's London HQ, it proved quite convincing with Atmos demo material, despite its compact nature. The subwoofer lacks genuine potency, but isn't necessarily a negative considering its target audience and room size. Talbot also sees the S-Series having an appeal to gamers.

Availability will initially be through Damson's website and Amazon. Other 'leading retailers' will follow throughout 2018. The S-Series will be sold as an £800 package to start with, but in six months time you'll be able to buy the S-Woofer and S-Bar alone (for a projected '£300-£400') and expand it later by adding S-Cubes and the S-Atmos.

Talbot's other plans are also interesting: 'We could produce a ceiling-mounted speaker, which could look like a light pendant hanging down, or actually create a ceiling-mounted one. Because of the flexibility within the system, it can be modular.'

'We'll also be developing further speakers in the range. An S-Cube with Atmos built into it, a bigger set of surround sound speakers or bigger soundbar if we wish, or an integrated soundbar with Atmos speakers built in.'

Dolby sales director Stefan Krampfer is certainly impressed: 'We really like this approach, because it's disruptive – not like those metre-long soundbars!'

The S-Series package – S-Bar with Atmos module attached, subwoofer and surrounds



This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



1 AV corps head to Bristol
Sound & Vision: The Bristol Show is returning to its regular Marriot City Centre Hotel stomping ground from February 23-25 for yet another showcase of hi-fi and home theatre goodness. There are currently 172 brands confirmed, promising demos and exclusive product reveals, and bigscreen video fans will be pleased to know that Optoma will be setting up camp with its UHZ65 4K laser projector (reviewed on page 52). Tickets are on sale now via www.bristolshow.co.uk.

2 The king of pirate shows
To the surprise of absolutely nobody, *Game of Thrones* has topped the list of the most-pirated TV shows through BitTorrent for a sixth consecutive year. While the bulk of the other TV shows in the Top 10 will be familiar from previous years, there are a few new faces on the list for 2017 including cult cartoon *Rick and Morty* and the *Prison Break* revival (in the fifth and sixth spots, respectively).

3 Sky scores with BT
Sky has come to an agreement with BT to offer BT Sport to its customers directly as either part of a Sky bundle or on a standalone basis. Meanwhile, Sky's Now TV service will be made available on BT TV set-top boxes. But it will take until 2019 to sort all this out.

4 First films on the Moon
Sony Pictures has signed a deal to provide content for the Royole Corporation's Moon 3D Mobile Theatre home cinema headset (reviewed in HCC #278). A selection of 2D and 3D Sony Pictures titles will be made available through the Royole Lounge app.

5 Justice for all in March?
If online retailer listings are to be believed, superhero blockbuster *Justice League* will make its bow on DVD, Blu-ray and Ultra HD Blu-ray in the US on March 13. Given the usual delay between US and UK releases from Warner Bros, we should see the title hit shelves on this side of the Atlantic around March 26.

6 War! What is it good for?
Christopher Nolan's *Dunkirk* has enjoyed a rapturous reception from UK consumers and retailers, selling more than the rest of the Top 10 titles combined by the midway point of its first week on release. Early retailer reports indicate that it's also on target to deliver the biggest-ever first week sales for a 4K Blu-ray in the UK.

7 Celebrating the best shops
PMC has announced the winners of its 2017 UK Retailer Awards, 'recognising those retailers that have made a substantial effort with their PMC business, and development of their own business,' over the past year. Hull's Fanthorpes HiFi grabbed Retailer of the Year for the fourth year on the run. Other winners include New Malden's Unilet Sound+Vision (Best Customer Service), Norfolk's Basically Sound (Best Demonstration), and Dunton's HiFi Lounge (Best Retail Experience).

8 Ageing well
Here's some good news for fans of Martin Scorsese: The Criterion Collection is bringing a director-approved 4K restoration of his lavish 1993 period drama *The Age of Innocence* to Blu-ray in the UK on March 19, joined by a collection of new interviews.

9 A beautiful year for discs
Disney's live-action remake of *Beauty and the Beast* was the UK's best-selling home entertainment release of 2017, selling more than 1.55m copies across physical and digital retail. *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* came a close second (with combined sales in excess of 1.38m), helped by being the year's best-selling Blu-ray.

10 LG seeks audio upgrades
In a move being seen as a response to Samsung's 2017 purchase of Harman International, LG Electronics has entered into a partnership with Meridian Audio. 'We are confident that our expertise and shared values will see us bring a great number of innovations to the market together, both now and in the future,' states Meridian Audio CEO John Buchanan.



Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

QT aims for the stars



Quentin Tarantino is planning to boldly go where no *Star Trek* movie has gone before. The *Pulp Fiction* director pitched J.J. Abrams his idea for an R-rated instalment of the sci-fi franchise, which is now being turned into a full script.

Paramount's playtime

We've good news for anybody out there still holding out for another *G.I. Joe* movie. Paramount Pictures recently announced a March 2020 release date for the third film in the series. The studio also plans to have a new *Dungeons & Dragons* movie in cinemas for July 2021.

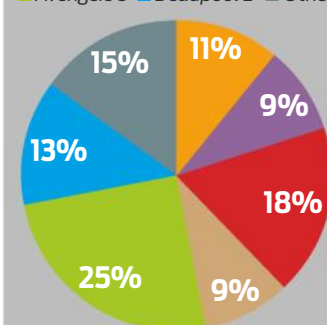
Ian McKellen open to TV Gandalf

It appears that Sir Ian McKellen would be happy to reprise the role of Gandalf for Amazon's recently announced *The Lord of the Rings* TV series. Speaking on BBC Radio 2, the septuagenarian actor stated, 'I haven't said yes because I haven't been asked. Gandalf is over 7,000 years old, so I'm not too old.'

We asked...

Which of these films are you most looking forward to in 2018?

■ *Solo: A Star Wars Story*
■ *Soldado*
■ *The Predator*
■ *Pacific Rim 2*
■ *Avengers 3*
■ *Deadpool 2*
■ Other



Results from www.homecinemachoice.com
Go online for more polling action

A sight for Saw eyes

Jigsaw → Lionsgate → DVD/Blu-ray/
Ultra HD Blu-ray

Giving lie to the title of 2010's *Saw: The Final Chapter*, the hit horror franchise returned to cinemas last Halloween to put yet more victims through the wringer in a series of diabolical death-traps. *Jigsaw*, the eighth film in the series, now becomes the first to be released on Ultra HD Blu-ray, with Lionsgate promising Dolby Atmos sonics and Dolby Vision visuals from the 4K platter when it lands (alongside the DVD and Full HD Blu-ray) on February 26. Extras include a producers' audio commentary and a seven-part *Making of...* documentary.



Hygge.

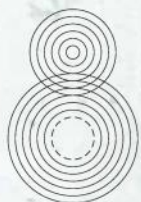
Who says it needs to be all about lamps and couches?

“What are you doing for your 40th birthday?”, everyone asked. We thought about it and decided that since we aren't wild about lavish cakes (although we do love a tasty fastelavnsbolle), we'd celebrate a little differently. Even the *thought* of making new speakers makes us warm and fuzzy, so that's what we chose to do.

Meet the Special Forty: hygge for your ears.

Laurels aren't for resting on, which is why we gave Dynaudio Labs free rein to play. (It gave our accountants a heart attack.) Our only instruction: take our classic tech and see what you'd do differently this time. Their design was nothing short of genius.

They took our classic Esotar 28mm soft-dome tweeter design, put our DSR* precision coating on it, and then **machined an aerodynamic vent** directly into the powerful neodymium magnet. Then they added more damping material and another pressure-release conduit. Take it apart and look behind it: it's a work of art (except please don't; we spent ages putting it together).



We made the drivers' frequencies overlap so we could keep the first-order crossover simple. After all, why add things that might affect the signal if you don't have to?

We called the new tweeter the Esotar Forty, and it's exclusive to this speaker.

We also gave the Special Forty a new woofer, made from our own super-stable Magnesium Silicate

Polymer. Its dome is coupled directly to the voice-coil for incredibly precise midrange performance. That's aided by the **new AirFlow Basket** – an aerodynamically shaped chassis that optimises rear airflow and isolates the driver from unwanted vibrations and resonances.

The woofer also has a **custom magnetic field** – one we created in the lab – thanks to a unique hybrid magnet system. It's part ferrite, part neodymium, and it physically manipulates flux to bend it around the voice-coil for greater power and efficiency.



The magnet sits inside the voice-coil (others put it outside). That lets us beam its energy to where we want it to go – not where it wants to go.

Those innovations mean the tweeter can reach down to 1000Hz, and the woofer up to 4000Hz. That overlap means smoother integration between treble and bass, and **performance that borders on mesmerising**.

We don't want to bore you with the maths, so here's the English: the extra air movement and flux containment means we have more control over how the tweeter and woofer move. And that means **a more detailed, precise and honest performance**. Just what we (and you) want.

This is a simple-looking speaker. Sure. But wait until you see its Grey Birch High Gloss and Red Birch High Gloss finishes. We painstakingly laminate Finnish Birch veneers many, many, *many* times and cross-cut

them to achieve this striking pattern. Then we use special stains to bring it out even further. Nice, isn't it.



The biggest decision you'll make today: Red Birch High Gloss or Grey Birch High Gloss? (Or just get one of each. You know it makes sense.)

We want to know what you think.

Join our Special Forty group and together we'll take our technology to the next level. That's right: you can be actively involved in shaping the future of our R&D. And you might even find your idea making it into our next-generation speakers. There's a fastelavnsbolle – and warm feelings of hygge – in it for you if you do.

www.dynaud.io/SpecialFortyForum

**Special occasion.
Special speaker.
Special Forty.**



*Wondering what 'DSR' stands for? It's Dynaudio Secret Recipe. And that's all you're getting out of us – apart from a fantastic tweeter, of course.

Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the HCC Facebook page

Your favourite BD and 4K discs of 2017...



Rogue One. Superior picture and sound.
Richard Farrer

Arrow Video's limited edition of *The Thing* – well packaged with extra docs you've not seen before! Always quality.
Robert Corrigan

Hacksaw Ridge for me. Great story and great picture quality on 4K.
Paul Vaughan

T2 3D, *Rogue One 3D*, *Valerian 3D*. All astonishing achievements.
Christopher Sedman

Probably *Rogue One*. I can get lost in the 3D worlds that sci-fi creates! Just watched *Valerian* in 3D and it also blew me away! *Guardians of Galaxy: Vol 2* is also great in 3D, but the first was better.
Theo Coetzee

What you're watching on your home cinema...



Two movies this weekend: *Baby Driver* and *Atomic Blonde*. One movie you must see is *House of Wax* in 3D. Just an amazing transfer on Blu-ray, fabulously atmospheric. Saw this 30 years ago and it feels like it's been cleaned up like a 100-year-old painting!

Steve Michael Clark

Kingsman: The Golden Circle on 4K UHD Blu-ray. It looked and sounded fantastic!

Mark Edwards

Dunkirk and *Brawl in Cell Block 99*.
Callum McKenzie

The *Dark Knight* 4K set – the DNR on *Batman Begins* and elevated blacks on *...Rises* are terrible.

Mike Wadkins



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Back of the 'net

Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



J-Law takes flight

Based on Jason Matthews' novel, thriller *Red Sparrow* arrives in UK March 2, with Jennifer Lawrence showing off her accent talents as a young Russian spy with choices to make. Fox's trailer is all about the moody soundtrack and web-of-lies plot. Looks fun, in a serious sort of way.

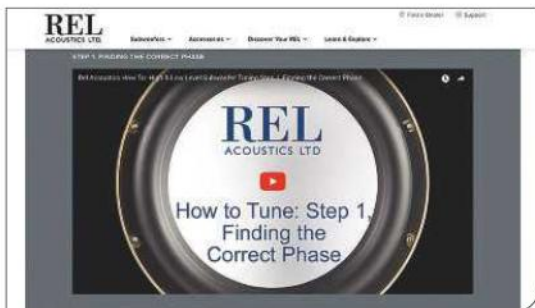
youtu.be/PmUL6wMpMWw



Don't look up

Sony's HT-ZF9 soundbar intends to offer Dolby Atmos and DTS:X thrills without all those pesky upfiring speakers courtesy of the brand's 'Vertical Sound Engine' technology. Here, Sony stalwart Eric Kingdon explains the thinking behind the 'bar and its 'sophisticated DSP'.

youtu.be/ErEB740apaU



Get the best from bass

Subwoofer marque REL is on a mission to help users of its hardware fine-tune their system's LFE performance, and has launched a series of videos on its website about connections, setting phase, positioning, etc. Each video is quite short, but covers off the basics well.

<https://rel.net/tune-rel-video-series>



Making 4K magic!

Andrew Cotton and Phil Layton from the BBC's R&D division are the authors of this detailed blog about the corporation's preparation for and eventual introduction of 4K HDR BBC iPlayer content (which kicked off with *Blue Planet II*). 'We are particularly interested in developing live capabilities,' say the duo.
<http://bbc.in/2l3Fcf4>



The boys are back

Sicario stars Benicio del Toro and Josh Brolin return for more war on drugs/covert ops drama in sequel *Soldado*, out in cinemas this June. *Gomorra* director Stefano Sollima takes the seat vacated by Denis Villeneuve, but writer Taylor Sheridan once again pens the script.

youtu.be/Pymm6cmE9uQ



The West End on your telly

Fancy mixing up the Marvel with some Shakespeare? On-demand subscription platform Digital Theatre offers over 65 live opera, ballet and theatre productions (with plenty more promised) streamed to your laptop/smart device for either a £10 monthly subscription or one-off 48-hour rental for £8.
www.digitaltheatre.com

More drivers than Tiger...

McIntosh XRT2.1K → www.mcintoshlabs.com

£137,500 gets well-heeled audio fans a pair of McIntosh's striking XRT2.1K speakers, which the brand claims have been 45 years in development. Standing around 7ft tall, each cabinet packs six 8in bass units and two 6.5in low-frequency drivers, with a line array of 28 mid-range and 45 0.75in tweeters suspended in front. This four-way approach aims to deliver a high-output, distortion-free performance across the frequency band. Separate binding posts for mid/high, low and sub-bass cater for triple-amped and tri-wired setups. Fancy a set? Get your order in at a McIntosh dealer.



CES 2018

HDR10+ gains traction, TV nit levels go through the roof and Sony promises virtual Dolby Atmos. **Team HCC** reports on this and more from the world's largest tech show



Samsung says 'Bring on The Wall'

If 2017 was the year that OLED TV went truly mainstream, OLED refusenik Samsung is no doubt hoping that it can regain lost ground in 2018, and its latest invention indicates where the future may lie. Certainly, the number of AV enthusiasts who will give serious consideration to its 146in The Wall TV is limited, whenever it should eventually come to market. But the tech behind it will raise a few eyebrows.

This LCD screen employs what Samsung terms 'MicroLED', meaning it jettisons a traditional backlight and colour filter in favour of micrometre-scale LEDs mounted behind Quantum Dots; each LED acts as its own pixel, giving the screen premium colour and illumination precision.

Says Jonghee Han, President of Visual Display Business at Samsung Electronics: 'At Samsung,

we're dedicated to providing consumers with a wide range of cutting-edge screen experiences. As the world's first consumer MicroLED television, The Wall represents another breakthrough.'

The Wall is also billed as a modular design. Additional screens can be added, courtesy of its bezel-free form, to create mega installations.

'It can transform into any size,' says Jonghee Han, 'and delivers incredible brightness, colour gamut, colour volume and black levels.'

Specs-wise, Samsung remains tight-lipped about potential nit level or contrast claims for its MicroLED flag-bearer. The panel, however, is 4K resolution. If that seems somewhat prosaic for a concept screen, the corp also chose CES 2018 to showcase a direct-lit 8K-resolution QLED, plus a further prototype 8K screen employing Micro Full Array LED backlighting technology, with more than 10,000

Samsung's modular MicroLED TV, dubbed The Wall, shows off its size

In an audiophile mood? CES saw Technics launch its \$10,000 SP-10R turntable, with brass-plated die-cast aluminium deck





With 8K content in short supply, Samsung is pushing its Artificial Intelligence (AI) upscaling algorithm



CEO Kaz Hirai is dwarfed by the size of Sony's stand during its CES conference

dimming zones and a 4,000-nit claimed brightness. Samsung is also particularly proud of its new AI-powered Full HD-to-8K upscaling, giving showgoers a comparison with a standard 4K screen.

Also demo'ing 8K at CES was Sony, with a prototype LED display using the new 'Ultimate' iteration of its X1 processor, for real-time polishing of 8K HDR content. From this concoction, Sony claims a staggering peak brightness figure of 10,000 nits.

As for TVs actually scheduled to come to market this year, Sony is refreshing its 4K LED TV lineup with a new XF90 series, which will be available at 49in, 55in, 65in and 75in. The processor here is the company's familiar X1 Extreme, albeit with new refinements, including X-Motion Clarity for improvements in tackling image blur.

The sets will support Dolby Vision (via a firmware update), and use direct LED illumination with local dimming. Android-powered (with integrated YouView), they will also offer 'hands-free control' via both Amazon Echo and Google Home devices. More affordable XF85 and XF80 ranges will also launch in the UK this year.

Sony's XF90 direct LED 4K TV will launch in 49in, 55in, 65in and 75in flavours



HDR10+ picks up Warner Bros

It was only at IFA in September that Blu-ray Disc Association spokesman Victor Matsuda suggested that the face-off between Dolby Vision and HDR10+ wasn't a format war. But anyone who had their fingers burnt when HD DVD and Blu-ray went laser-to-laser may be getting that sinking feeling all over again.

As Las Vegas prepared to open doors to showgoers, Samsung, Panasonic and 20th Century Fox opened their arms to content creators, SoC makers, kit manufacturers and studios, urging them to embrace the HDR10+ dynamic metadata revolution – before highlighting that Hollywood heavyweight Warner Bros had joined the party.

'The HDR10+ platform will soon be made available royalty-free with only a nominal administrative fee,' said the trio.

'Companies can learn about the license program including final specifications, adopter agreements and sign up to receive a notification when technical specifications for HDR10+ become available.

'Ultra HD Blu-ray metadata generation tools have been developed with third parties and will soon be available for content creators enabling Ultra HD Blu-ray players to enter the market.'

The addition of Warner Bros is reminiscent of the studio's strategy during the HD DVD/Blu-ray era, when – for a period – it released software on both formats. Warner, along with Universal, Paramount, Sony Pictures and Lionsgate, has been releasing Dolby Vision-encoded UHD Blu-rays. It now joins Amazon and Fox as HDR10+ software partners, although at the time of writing, there wasn't confirmation that its HDR10+ strategy applied to streamed content, physical media, or both.

Like Dolby Vision, HDR10+ is a dynamic metadata HDR format (albeit 10-bit rather than 12-bit), issuing scene-by-scene instruction to a display device on how best to present HDR content. Its static metadata companion, HDR10, is a mandatory part of the 4K BD specification. Dolby Vision, in the spec since day one, is an optional format. HDR10+ is being added to the roster.

In hardware terms, the current landscape sees an even split between the Big Four brands – Sony and LG selling DV-compatible screens, Panasonic and Samsung offering HDR10+. Many potential TV buyers may see that as reason enough to put a purchase on hold while this not-a-format-war pans out.



LG, Sony and Panasonic move forward with OLED

LG kicked off its 2018 by announcing ThinQ, an integrated AI/image processing engine that will lurk amongst its TV lineup. Claimed to handle 'hundreds' of voice requests through LG's own smart platform and third-party AI services, as well as being compatible with other smart home devices, the notion is that it can turn a TV into a central smart hub, all controlled by its owner's voice.

The brand's ThinQ-enabled TV lineup includes successors to its popular 2017 range of OLEDs, now armed with new Alpha9 processors. As before, the Wallpaper TV model (now the W8 in 77in and 65in guises) will be LG's flagship; step-down E8, C8 and B8 ranges (including 55in screen sizes) complete the OLED picture.

Perhaps more surprising is the news that its Nano Cell SUHD stable of LED-lit LCD TVs will be moving to full-array local dimming (FALD) backlights. Models confirmed at CES are the 65in/55in SK9000 and SK9500. A lower series, the SK8500 misses out on full-array dimming. Dolby Vision playback is offered throughout.

Panasonic, meanwhile, is retaining its flagship EZ1002 OLED TV, but bringing in newer models below. The FZ950 and FZ800 ranges, both available in 65in and 55in screen sizes, offer 'significant under-the-hood advancements,' and are billed as the world's first OLED models to support HDR10+, at this stage via the Amazon Prime Video catalogue.



Panasonic's new OLED models support HDR10+ content

LG's SK9500 SUHD TV adds full array local dimming to its Nano Cell panel

For its AF8 OLED (below), Sony is using a more traditional stand design



For this lineup, Panasonic has revised its HCX processor, previously debuted last year, to include a Dynamic LUT (Look-Up Table) engine. The brand claims this has a marked effect on the TV's colour performance, as it reloads an LUT to correspond to fluctuating brightness levels from scene to scene. 'This brings significant improvements to mid-brightness scenes, making them look much more natural,' says Panasonic.

The two new ranges feature an Absolute Black Filter, designed to limit screen reflections when viewed in ambient light. This was a feature of the EZ1002, but not 2017's EZ952. Calibration tools have also been buffed up, and now include calibration points at 5 per cent and 2.5 per cent luminance.

Once again, Panasonic is describing the TVs' designs as befitting its 'Art + Interior' ethos. Our preferred description is 'Dark + Moody'. Metallic black bezels and discreet stands make them appear cut out for cinema room use.

For audio, the FZ950 features a 'Tuned by Technics' Dynamic Blade speaker. Both it and the FZ800 models are expected to earn Ultra HD Premium and THX certification before release.

Sony's new OLED series, the Dolby Vision-ready AF8, draws heavily on its AI forebear – the same Acoustic Surface invisible speaker technology is used, as is the same processor and OLED panel.

Yet the eye-catching design of the A1 has had something of an overhaul. Previously Sony's OLED leaned back on a hidden pedestal, the result being a TV that stood out from the crowd, but perhaps wasn't best suited to low-level AV furniture. The AF8 (65in and 55in) features a more traditional (although still discreet) desktop stand and vertical orientation. Sony says the A1 will remain part of the brand's range in 2018, essentially giving buyers a choice between the different form factors.



One 4K BD player to rule them all?

No sooner have AV fans had to worry about competing HDR formats, than Panasonic pulls out a surprise by announcing a disc-spinner *au fait* with HDR10+ and Dolby Vision.

The DP-UB820 will sit at the top of the company's 2018 BD player range, and promises to spin any premium HDR format you can throw at it (once the relevant software update has landed). Sporting the same glossy black chassis and hidden disc tray as last year's DMP-UB700, the deck offers connective talents both old and new – dual HDMI outputs and 7.1 analogue outs for AV system integration; Amazon Alexa and Google Home support for AI tech enthusiasts.

Hi-res file playback including FLAC, ALAC, WAV and DSD (to 11.2MHz) is joined by Panasonic's Digital

Tube Sound processing and upsampling. But there's no playback support for SACD or DVD-Audio.

Beneath the DP-UB820 is a further trio of models, all with shrinking specifications. The UB420 drops the multichannel analogue output and Dolby Vision playback, the UB330 loses the twin HDMI outs and audio processing features, and the UB320 arrives sans Wi-Fi connection. However, video tuning tricks are generally shared across the board, including 4K High-Precision Chroma processing and the HDR Adjustment tool granting users different image settings to suit their viewing environment. The UB820 and 420 also feature an HDR Optimizer, where tone mapping is handled by the player, rather than the display – Panasonic says this means 'stable HDR picture quality is delivered regardless of the TV,' and elicits optimal playback from HDR10 sources.

LG joins short-throw PJ brigade

Adding a twist to the typical ultra-short-throw projector is LG's HU80K, which ups resolution to 4K and incorporates a WebOS 3.5 interface (via Wi-Fi or Ethernet hookup) for 2,160p video streaming – with HDR10 support. HDMI is an input option for BD player-based setups.

Designed to be used mainly in living room environments, this curiously styled PJ (it stands vertically, and sports a carry handle) claims 2,500 Lumens, and an image size up to 150in – although the company hasn't given a specified throw ratio. Under the hood is a TI DLP 4K chip.

There's no word yet on price, but expect it to be higher than much of the more conventional 4K DLP competition. LG says the HU80K 'will lead the way in changing how consumers view 4K content.' Other brands might have something to say about that...



Atmos, but not as we know it

We're used to framing conversations around Dolby Atmos with terms such as '5.1.2' or '7.2.4', but Sony is branching out in a different direction with its HT-ZF9 soundbar (pictured left), which features a triple-driver array (left, centre, right) and additional subwoofer, yet incorporates Dolby Atmos decoding.

Eschewing upfiring speakers (which the brand says aren't always ideal depending on room conditions), it instead employs a Vertical Surround Engine to process incoming signals (including non-Atmos/DTS:X mixes) and output them with a sense of height and surround immersion. For discrete 5.1 multichannel, it can be paired with Sony's optional SA-Z9R speakers.

The HT-ZF9 offers 4K HDR passthrough over its HDMI connectivity, hi-res audio support, plus Chromecast and Google Assistant integration. It will launch this Spring at £600 ■

WebOS 3.5 is built-into LG's short-throw 4K PJ (above), enabling bigscreen VOD



CES 2018

Next issue...

HDR10+ and OLED: in-depth with Panasonic; Sennheiser debuts Ambeo 3D soundbar; LG rolls up OLED TV; Denon refreshes flagship AV amp; and more...

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BACK TO THE FUTURE...

Blade Runner 2049 director **Denis Villeneuve** discusses the film's visual aesthetic, working with Roger Deakins, and his hatred of green-screen FX





Villeneuve's previous credits include *Arrival*, *Sicario* and *Prisoners* – and his next project is an adaptation of *Dune*

The original *Blade Runner* is a film that fans and directors love...

I think the first *Blade Runner*, when it came out on the screen, sent a shock wave into the world. It was a collective shock. For some people it was a positive one, they were amazed; others were terrified. [Director] Ridley Scott and [writer] Hampton Fancher had a strong vision of what could be our future. It struck everybody.

The dream was so powerful and so seductive and frightening at the same time, that you had to choose your camp. Do you dream about this world? Do you want to be part of it? Or are you afraid of it and trying to avoid it?

We all felt when we saw the movie that the filmmakers had created something that could be possible. That was fascinating, from a design point of view, but very frightening at the same time.

And it was the first time that I was seeing a vision of what could be the future for real. The movie was aesthetically an extension of what was going on in the 1980s. And it was the first time that someone was showing me the future, and it was fascinating and quite frightening at the same time.

Ridley Scott is a specialist of hybridization. He had successfully merged science-fiction with horror with *Alien*... With *Blade Runner* he was blending sci-fi and film noir.

It's been influential in terms of its visuals and aesthetic, and the ideas it raises...

Yes. From a visual point of view, it's a movie that took as its root – and was deeply influenced by – the punk movement... a very radical aesthetic movement at the end of the '60s and into the '70s. And we see that radical point of view in the movie.

It's like a movie that revisits the Frankenstein mythology about a man that will want to play God. And for me the main idea of the movie is how angry we are towards God, towards our creator. How angry we are towards the fact that we have to deal with the human condition. And that anger is something that's very alive inside us.

Ridley Scott just put his finger on it. I think that's why the movie is so visceral, so powerful. It's not a very intellectual movie, it's a very visceral movie.

I remember seeing the first images coming out of Deckard flying above Los Angeles. And it was something that was so far away from anything we had seen before. This was so different. I remember seeing the movie and being shocked by what I think is one of the most powerful openings of any movie in cinema history.

'Los Angeles, November, 2019'. Then you see that field, that landscape of oil factories. Aesthetically it's a movie that influenced me. I didn't know at the time I would become a filmmaker, but I know that it has had a deep influence on my work since then.

How did you come about directing this new *Blade Runner*?

I would have never dared, honestly, to propose myself for such a task. I was meeting with Andrew Kosove and Broderick Johnson about *Prisoners* [2013 thriller]. They stopped the meeting and said, 'We have to stop because Ridley Scott will come in. He's in the other room right now and we have to meet with him because we're planning to do a sequel to *Blade Runner*.'

At that precise moment, I thought it was the most insane and beautiful idea at the same time. Because it's such a challenge. It's such a difficult thing to go on with the story, to try to reproduce what had been a landmark in film history. It's not a small thing. I remember saying, 'Good luck guys'.

Knowing that Ridley was there, knowing that he was behind the project, I said to myself, wow, I can't wait to see that. I remember being in their office and peeking in the boxes to see artwork that Ridley was doing.

To answer to your question, it came out of the blue. One day Andrew said to me, 'I need to see you.' I was in New Mexico at the time. We sat together in a coffee shop. He said, 'This is the screenplay for the next *Blade Runner*'. I was so moved that he would trust me to read the screenplay and give my opinion about it. It was the biggest compliment I've ever received.

Once I read the screenplay, the first thing that I thought is, 'Will I be able to do this?' I dreamed a lot before saying yes. It took a lot of time. One of the conditions was that I needed Ridley Scott's blessing. I needed to sit in front of him, looking at him in the



Win! Win! Win!

Five *Blade Runner 2049* Blu-rays up for grabs!



Blade Runner 2049 is available to Download & Keep from January 28 before being released on Limited Edition 4K UHD with Whiskey Glasses, 4K UHD, 3D Steelbook, 2-Disc Limited Edition Blu-ray™, Blu-ray™, 3D Blu-ray™ and DVD on February 5, courtesy of Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. To celebrate, we have five *Blade Runner 2049* BDs to be won!

Question:

Which actress plays K's boss, Lieutenant Joshi, in the film?

Answer:

- A) Robin Wright
- B) Ana de Armas
- C) Sylvia Hoeks

Email your answer with 'Blade Runner 2049' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address! See p85 for full T&Cs.

Blade Runner 2049 is 'inspired by bad days in Montreal, where it's all snow and sludge,' says Villeneuve



L-R: Villeneuve, Ridley Scott, Harrison Ford and Ryan Gosling – maybe they're all replicants...

eyes and saying, 'You agree that I will take part in this dream with you.' And that was my only condition. I needed Ridley's blessing.

How did that meeting go?

Ridley Scott is one of my heroes, he's one of the best directors in film history. So to meet him was intimidating at first.

He told me the genesis of *Blade Runner* for him. Where it came from, what was his goal. He said to me exactly what I needed to hear, which is that he would give me total freedom. But if ever I needed him I could call him any time to ask him questions about design, about concept art, about style, about actors – he was open to any kind of question.

At the end [of the meeting] he said: 'Listen, it's very simple. If you do your homework correctly, it can be fantastic. If you f**k it up, it's going to be a disaster.'

What was important to keep from the original?

The thing I felt that was the most important thing for Ridley, is not what is shown in the movie. It's what he didn't show. Off-world. The mythology behind how

the replicants are designed and built, etc. When you think about it, *Blade Runner* is a very intimate story with a lot of scope. You have that fantastic world around you, but you are always on the human point, at the human level, and you are always just behind Rick Deckard. It was one of the strengths and the genius of Ridley to approach the movie in this way. So it means they found ways to make us feel how big this world is without showing it.

That is still one of the big strengths of that film. I think what Ridley wanted was to keep the mythology alive by not showing it. I needed to be very careful where I put my camera.

The first problem that I had to deal with was: I'm going to be in 2049, and what is in a *Blade Runner* universe? Because as we know, the first movie was set in 2019. We all know that it was prophetic in some ways, that there are a lot of things we saw in the first movie that are alive today. But, at the same time, it's a different world. There was no Steve Jobs in the *Blade Runner* of 2019. So it meant that I had to build an alternative universe. ...2049 is the extension of the original *Blade Runner*. It's not an extension of reality like the first *Blade Runner* was.

That is a choice that made sense to me, and made sense to Hampton Fancher as well. He said, 'Stop putting pressure on your shoulders. The first movie was a dream. We just dreamt a lot, and you have to do the same thing. Don't try to think about the logic of it.'

This movie is different from any other project I've done in my life. I was used to creating worlds that were coming out of myself. I did an adaptation of a play, but still I had to create the images. Now the world was already designed by someone else.

How was Ryan Gosling cast as K?

One thing that was suggested when I read the screenplay was that K could be played by Gosling. I think it was Ridley's idea. As soon as I read the screenplay I said yes immediately. There is nobody

else. He's someone that can express everything just by moving an eyebrow, you know?

As a director I always try to find a muse on a project. You don't have always one, but when you find one, it's very powerful.

That's the dream, to find an actress or an actor that will become your main colour, the soul that you are trying to capture with your camera. Ryan became that muse very quickly.

When did you find out Harrison Ford was onboard?

Harrison was part of the project from day one. It would not be possible to make a *Blade Runner* without Harrison Ford, of course.

How important was it for you to tie the two films together visually?

That was one of the big challenges – to tie both movies visually, and at the same time create something that has its own identity. We all felt the same pressure and the same responsibility to honour the first movie, but at the same time to make our own movie.

So the good news is that the screenplay was allowing me to get out of Los Angeles. And that gave me the opportunity to think about what the world will look alike around the vicinity of the city. The areas around California, to dream about this place and to make sure that it will be logical from an aesthetic point of view.

There was one element that, for me, was deeply inspiring, and that was the fact the climate will have totally changed between both movies. The first movie was more inspired by bad days in London where Ridley [was] coming from. Me, I'm coming from Montreal. So, the movie is more inspired by bad days in Montreal, where it's all snow and sludge and cold. And that necessarily brought visually a difference in the atmosphere and in the colour palette.

And you take us to Las Vegas...

What would Las Vegas look like in 2049? For that there was only one man that could give me the answer. I went back to the original creator of *Blade Runner*... the architect... I went back to Syd Mead [legendary 'visual futurist'/concept designer].

I felt he was the only one who could bring Las Vegas into the *Blade Runner* universe. I explained my challenge and he agreed to help me. He brought those insanely beautiful views of Las Vegas that I'm very proud of.

Whose idea was it to have practical sets?

It's a decision that came early in the film process, that we would use as little green screen as possible. We would use as many practical sets as possible, and real vehicles as much as possible. Basically it was for my own mental sanity. I hate green screens. I'm not comfortable with that colour, I'm not comfortable with what it means to work in a virtual world.

I need tangible things. I need real objects, I need real props, I need real environments, because those



Joi (played by Ana de Armas)
– K's hologram companion

environments will trigger ideas, will trigger shots, will inspire cinema. At the end of the day, my movies are inspired by actors. And those actors need to be fuelled by a world. I need to give them all they could need to be inspired. So that's why it's the first thing that I decided with Roger Deakins, my cinematographer, to construct everything.

We used very little green screen on the movie. Of course there [is] CG in extension, because obviously you were creating a whole world. But, everything you are seeing in the movie is, at first glance, at the beginning, in the foreground... it's real. That is a big victory and I'm grateful that we went in that direction.

Roger came onboard very early in the process because I was doing another movie and I felt I needed a lot of prep. And I wanted to have time to dream about the movie, to design the movie with a very, very small unit before starting the official prep. I spent weeks in a little hotel room with Roger and my storyboard artist Sam, to storyboard the movie, to design and create the world that we will be in.

Roger was part of the birth of the cinematic language of *Blade Runner 2049* from the start. So I felt that, at one point, it was as much Roger's movie as mine. And he cares about the movie as much as I do.

I said to him, 'For once, you could go an impressionistic way, you could let it go. You're totally free. You can do whatever you want.'

People will be blown away by what Roger did in *Blade Runner 2049* because I think it's among his best work. And we're talking about the best work of one of the best cinematographers of all time. People won't be disappointed. Visually it's very strong ■

Blade Runner 2049 cinematographer
Roger Deakins has been Oscar-
nominated 13 times, but never won...





'Fee-fi-fo-fum...'



Time to party like it's 2049!

Stunning sci-fi sequel looks and sounds superb on BD, but could it have been even better?

→ **BLADE RUNNER 2049: LIMITED EDITION BLU-RAY**

This long-awaited follow-up to Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic is one of those rarest of things: a sequel that actually expands on the thematic concerns of its predecessor in a meaningful way, rather than simply running through the same old setups. But more than that, director Denis Villeneuve invests his sequel with the one thing that Scott failed to bring – a heartfelt love story. In doing so, he's created a modern sci-fi masterpiece that's more ambitious, more profound and more affecting than the original.

Picture: Shot primarily using Arri Alexa XT Studio cameras and finished as a 4K Digital Intermediate, *Blade Runner 2049* makes for a jaw-droppingly gorgeous Blu-ray experience.

The 2.40:1-framed AVC encode regularly breaks free from its bleak neo-noir setting with bursts of bright, intense primary colours that really pop out of the gloom (check out all of the neon signs in and around Bibi's Bar in Chapter 5). And changes in setting bring their own specific palettes to the film, with the brightly-lit junk-strewn wastelands giving you a chance to wallow in the incredible detailing on show, while the visit to Las Vegas washes everything with a vivid burnt orange aesthetic. Accurate contrast and brightness levels result in perfectly judged black levels that are deep and inky, while also bringing plenty of shadow detail to the fore.

If we're going to pick faults then we did spot a couple of instances of banding in areas of bright light (the most obvious being in the glare of the spinners' headlights as they fly through the dark clouds in



Ridley Scott has revealed that he has an idea for a *Blade Runner 2049* follow-up

Chapter 15), but this is a minor issue in an otherwise entirely demo-worthy Blu-ray showcase.

Audio: The sense of space conjured up by the film's DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1 track is nothing less than breathtaking, surrounding you at all times with subtle ambient effects. The precision of the imaging and placement in the soundscape is highly effective.

Action scenes are also extremely well-served by the mix, which throws around high-impact surround effects with aplomb and backs them up with some wonderfully deep bass (Chapter 12's Vegas attack being a prime example). We've also no complaints with the dialogue presentation, which sounds entirely natural while being prioritised in the mix, or the handling of the Vangelis-styled electronic score.

However, while this may well be a five-star 5.1 soundtrack, we know it could (and should) be even better. The Warner Bros. US release includes a Dolby Atmos mix that Sony Pictures has decided to make a UHD BD-exclusive here in the UK. Still, it could have been worse: a rep for Sony Pictures has confirmed that its 3D disc only packs a Dolby Digital 5.1 track.

Extras: As well as the film, the first disc in this set houses the 22-minute *Designing the World of Blade Runner 2049* documentary; three short films (one animated) that fill in some gaps between the original film and its sequel; plus six two-minute *Blade Runner 101* promo featurettes.

The bonus Blu-ray disc exclusive to this Limited Edition release adds a 17-minute piece dealing with the cast and a trio of six-minute featurettes focusing on fight scenes, costume design, and the challenges involved in shooting the surreal love scene. It also comes bundled with five art cards.

HCC VERDICT

Blade Runner 2049: Limited Edition Blu-ray

→ Sony Pictures → All-region BD
→ £30

WE SAY: This ambitious sci-fi sequel looks sensational on Blu-ray, but the lack of Atmos audio is a downer.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

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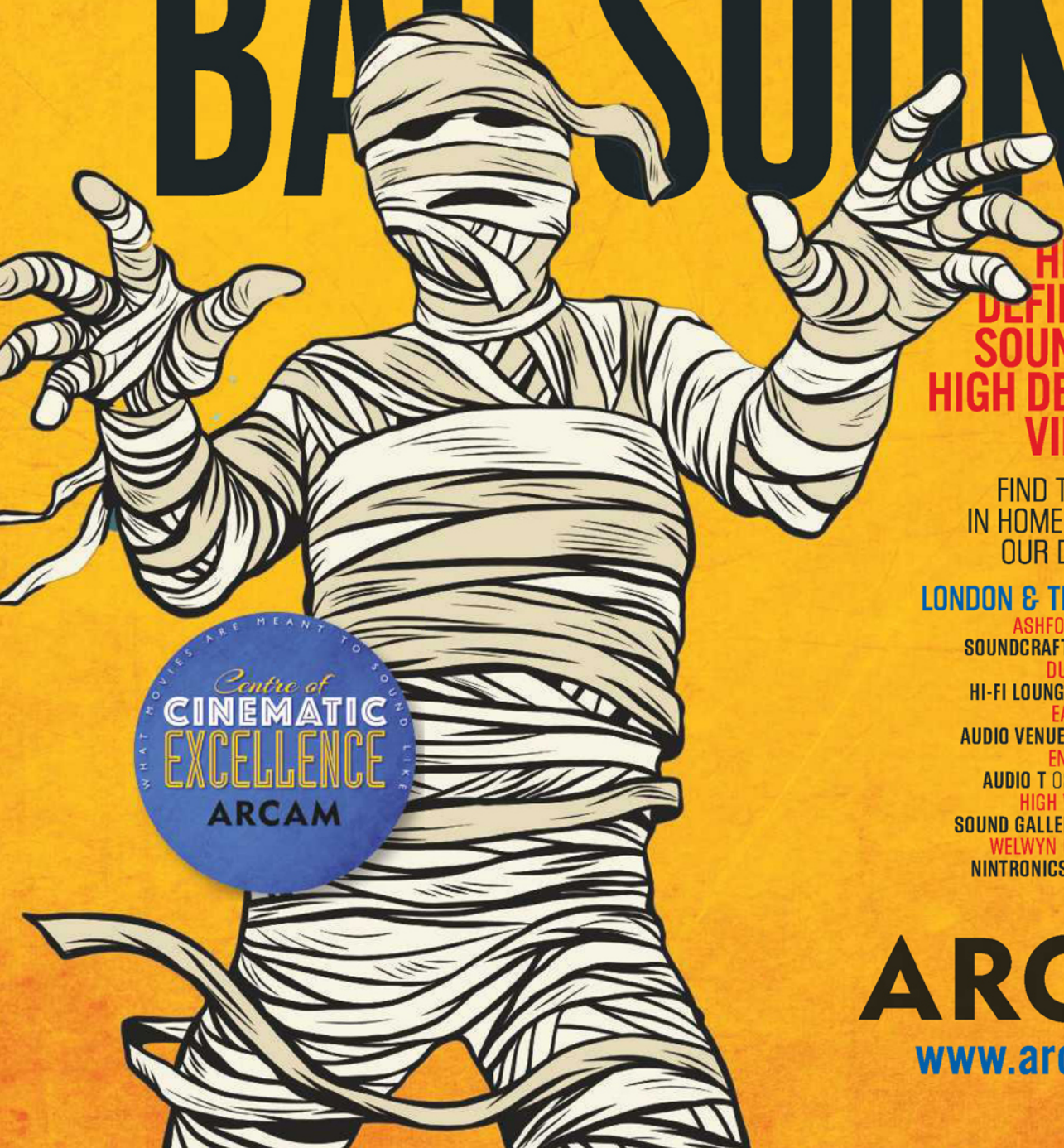
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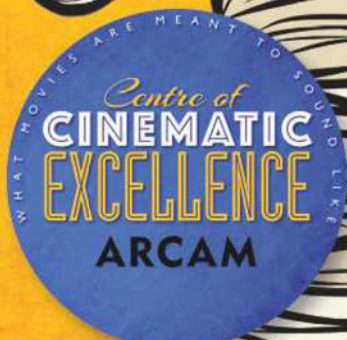
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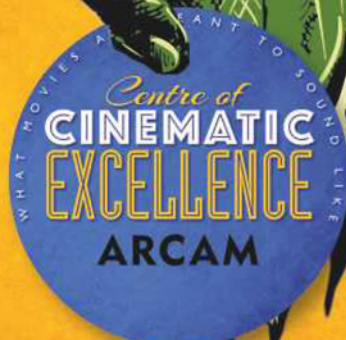
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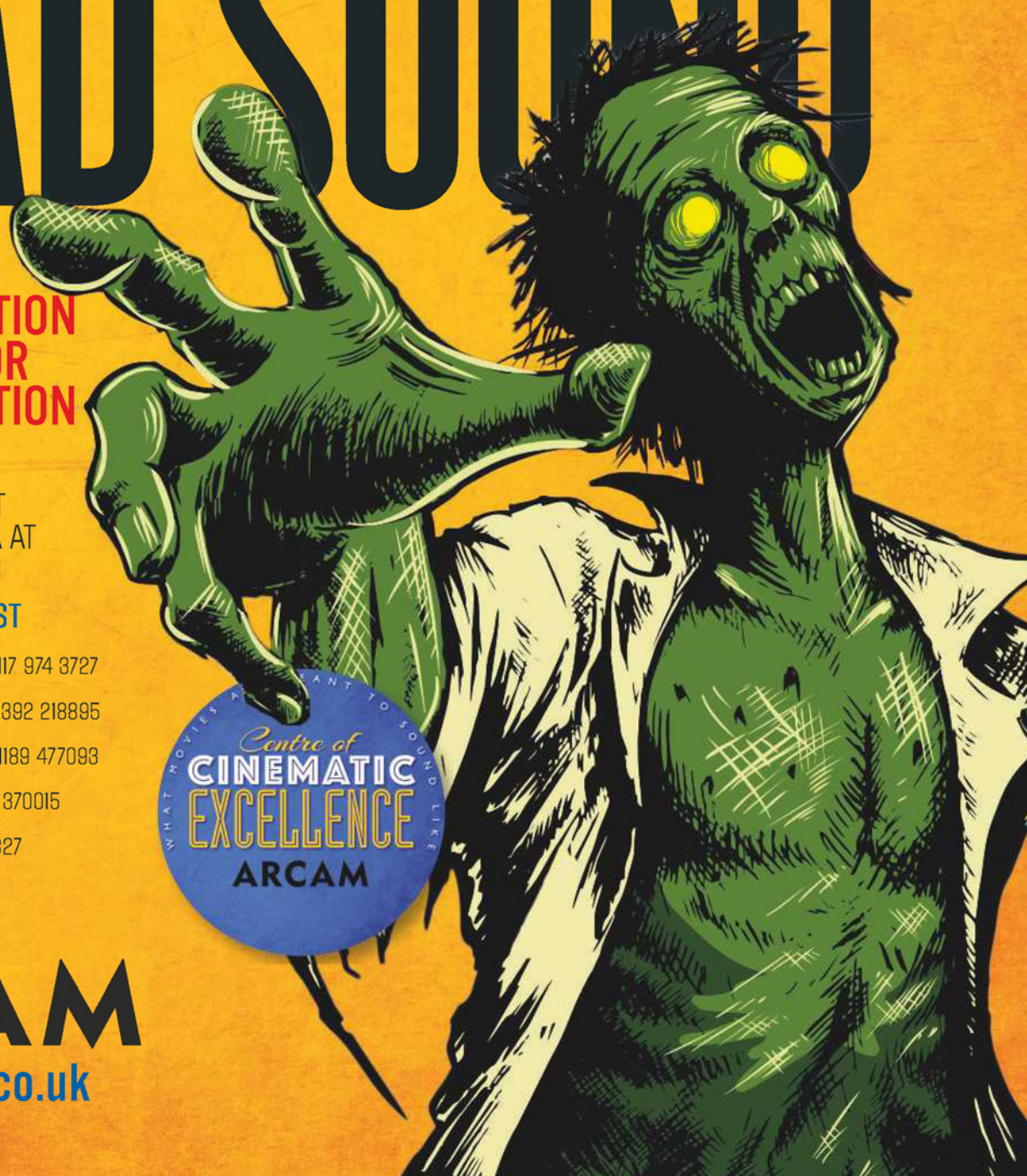
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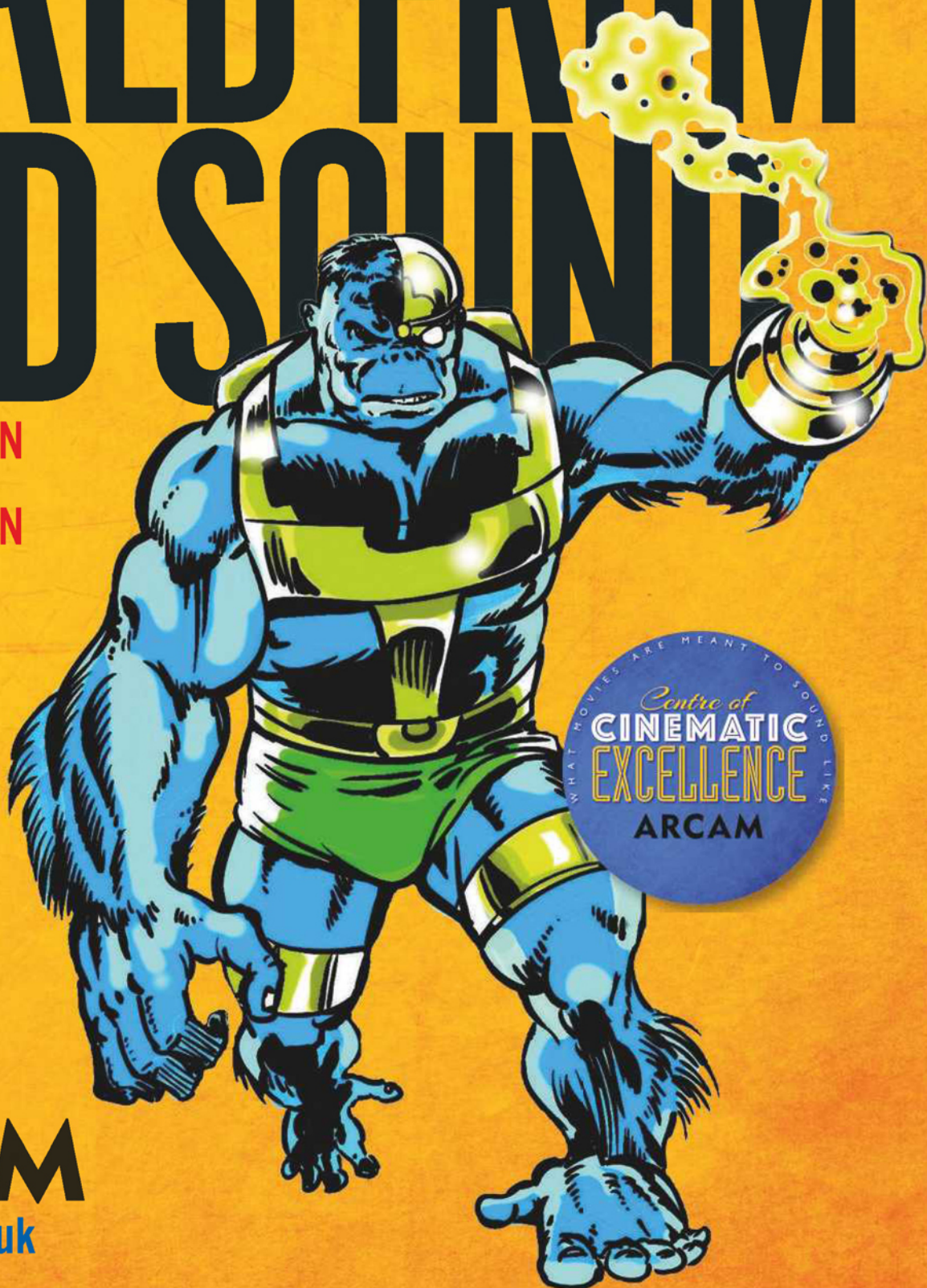
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'And the award goes to...'

Check out a room featuring 9.1.6 Atmos sonics, Trinnov processing, 4K projection and an owner with a passion for sci-fi flicks

KIT CHECKLIST

TRINNOV: Altitude32 processor

ROTEL: Power amplifiers

SONY: VPL-VW520ES native 4K/HDR projector, ISF calibrated

SCREEN EXCELLENCE: 130in 2.37:1 acoustically transparent projector screen

ARTCOUSTIC: 9.1.6 Dolby Atmos audio system featuring on-wall Spitfire 8-4s and 6-3s, in-ceiling Architect 2-1 SLs, and Control 2 subwoofer

OPPO: 4K Blu-ray player

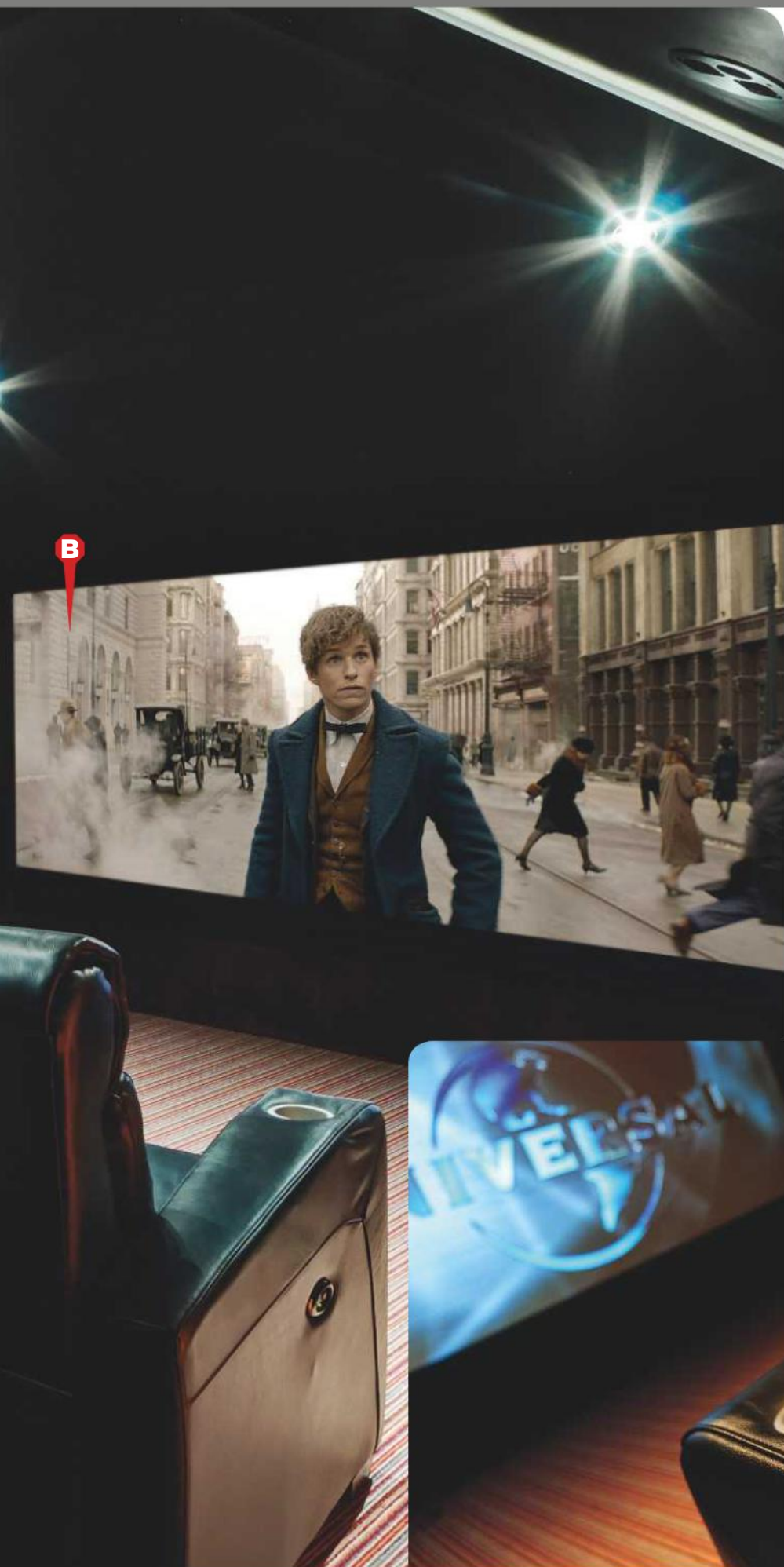
SKY: Q Silver PVR

APPLE: Apple TV

AMAZON: Fire TV

FRONT ROW: Home cinema seating

CONTROL 4: 7in touchpanel control



THE OWNER OF this cinema room has an extra reason to love it – last year it was crowned Best Home Cinema in the £40,000-£100,000 category in the CEDIA Awards. Completed by London/south coast-based pro outfit Pyramid AV, it features native 4K projection and a state-of-the-art Dolby Atmos speaker configuration.

It's the first dedicated home cinema room that Vince, its owner, has had: 'Like many others, we've had others rooms with AV kit installed – but nothing on this scale.' It's part of a self-build property, where the space for a cinema was one of the first areas to be created.

The room has six seats spread over two tiers, with each one getting uninhibited line of sight to its centre-piece – a 130in, 2.37:1 projector screen that acts as the canvas for a Sony VPL-VW520ES 4K projector.

It's a largescale theatre then, and has the audio to match. A 9.1.6-channel Dolby Atmos Artcoustic array, fed by high-end Trinnov processing and established with guidance from Dolby in the US due to the cinema's angled ceilings, handles soundmixes from the associated 4K BD, Sky Q, Apple and Amazon sources. Power comes from Rotel amplifiers.

A. Oh, what an atmosphere!

The cinema features six in-ceiling speakers, ensuring an immersive canopy to accompany the nine-channel bed

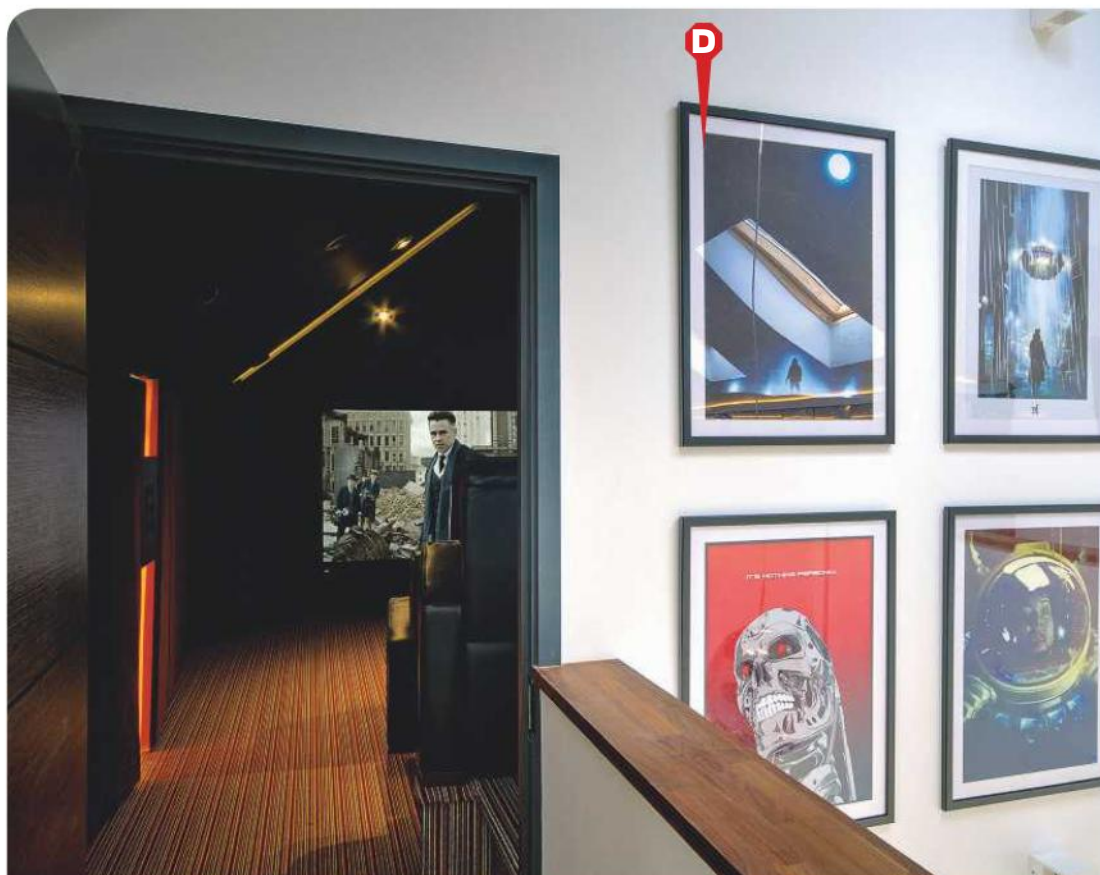
B. Wide boy

Making the most of CinemaScope ratio movies is this 2.37:1 fixed-frame Screen Excellence screen, fitted with acoustically transparent material to allow the LCR speakers to be mounted behind

C. Touch and go

For system control, Pyramid AV specced a Control4 setup (also used throughout the house), accessible from this 7in touchscreen or the family's smart devices, which grants simplified, automated control over AV hardware and lighting



**D. Take a look**

Before entering Vince's theatre, guests are treated to a gallery of iconic movie art – with an obvious sci-fi theme

E. Two-way precision

Artcoustic's Spitfire 6-3 on-wall speaker uses six midrange and three high-frequency drivers, for a claimed sensitivity of 98dB and a frequency response of 65Hz to 40kHz

F. A head for heights

The heart of the room's 16-speaker Atmos system is Trinnov's ultra-premium Altitude32 processor, which can handle up to 32 channels



The setup is controlled via a wider Control4 network that marshals other zones in the property. 'This was the right choice for us,' says Vince. 'We have AV across the house and a single remote – or smartphone – allows us to control just about every device we have.'

Let's get ready to rumble

Vince wasted little time in putting his new room to the test with some choice demo favourites. 'Pacific Rim' was one of the first we sat and watched. It's FX-heavy – visually and sonically – and delivered a seat-shaking experience.

'The amount of detail you can hear and the way the sound moves around using Atmos is just incredible. Nic [Pyramid AV MD] has delivered perfection to one of his fussiest customers!'

Sci-fi makes up a large part of Vince's viewing – he ranks *Oblivion*, *Interstellar*, *Inception*, *Gravity* and *Everest* as his five film favourites. 'Oblivion in 4K looks and sounds incredible,' he tells us.

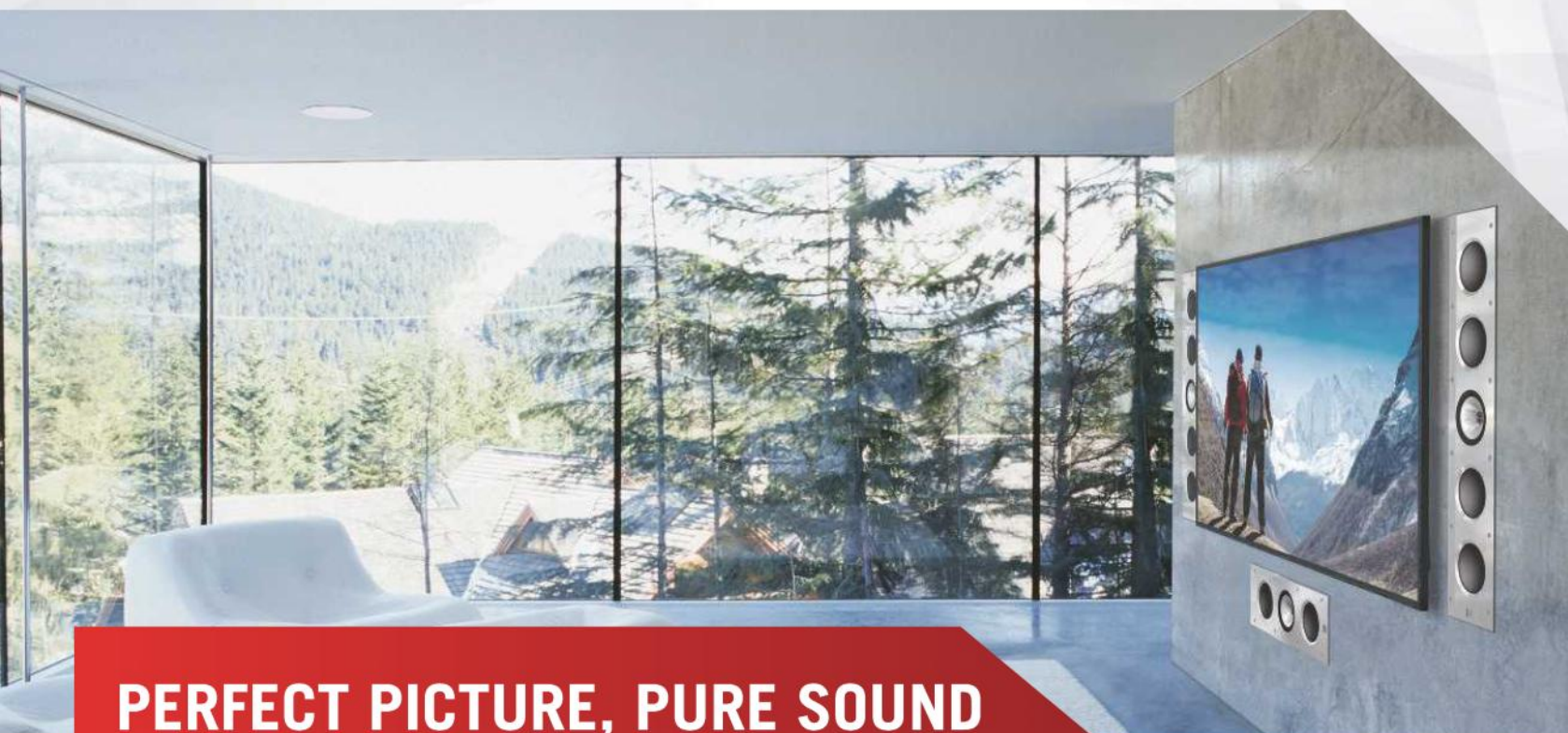
Music is getting a lot of play, too. 'Blu-ray audio sounds amazing. As a 1980s' music fan, sticking on some remastered Simple Minds or Tears for Fears brings out so much from these classic albums – they sound so different to vinyl or CD. I think that's an often overlooked feature.'

Saturday evenings and Sunday afternoons are now marked in the diary for movie viewing in the new room. 'But,' says Vince, 'the system is just as good for normal TV viewing – boxset binges are handled in comfort! The quality of the technology, environment and acoustics makes for a truly awesome experience.' ■





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QLED TV

REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE** **MONITOR AUDIO** 5.1 floorstanding array with dipole/bipole surrounds
JVC Entry-level HDR/4K scaling projector **SONY** Flagship 100in 4K LED TV and audiophile UHD Blu-ray player **MARANTZ** 9-channel AVR with three flavours of 3D audio **SAMSUNG** 55in QLED TV
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Laser-like precision?



Optoma's UHZ65 projector adds laser illumination to the 4K DLP market. How much of an impact does this have on its home cinema potential? Turn to page 52 to find out...

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

Ed Selley listens to
Monitor Audio's
revamped, home
cinema-centric
Silver range



Made for movie fans

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1 floorstanding system with dipole/bipole surrounds

POSITION:
Below Gold and above Bronze in MA's metal-themed stable

PEERS:
KEF Q Series; DALI Opticon

1. The Silver 500s use dual 8in bass drivers and claim a 30Hz low-end extension

There has long been considerable variation in what constitutes a 'home cinema' package of speakers. For some companies, the addition of a centre speaker into a range means that they are all set to contest for your hard-earned cash (and some of those 'centres' can look very like a standmount tipped on its side). Others will develop their own subwoofers. A select few will go the extra mile – like Monitor Audio.

The British manufacturer long been one of the good guys in this regard. As well as centre speakers (and, crucially, often more than one centre speaker per range), it has produced its own subwoofers and dedicated surround speakers for most of its product lines.

Now we have an all-new Silver range to investigate and, as usual, Monitor Audio hasn't skimped on the AV bits. As well as two centre speakers, there's a dedicated sub – which is somewhat cleverer than it looks – and a purpose-built surround speaker.

In terms of pecking order, the Silver series sits below Monitor Audio's Gold (natch), but also below the ultra-premium Platinum line. It ranks above – you guessed it – the entry-level Bronze.

Make mine a large

The Silver 500 package auditioned here is so called because it uses the largest of three floorstanders in the range, the Silver 500. And, it has to be said, this speaker is a bit of a whopper.

On its front are a pair of 8in bass drivers (the largest standmount in MA's lineup, the Silver 100, also features an 8in unit). This means that before you've even got around to turning the subwoofer on, you have a set of speakers that are apparently capable of hitting 30Hz, albeit with a -6dB roll off.

Joining these is a dedicated 4in midrange driver, making the Silver 500 (£1,500-per-pair) a three-way design. This unit is installed into a separate internal enclosure to the bass drivers. Cabinet design, aided by laser scanning research at the National Physical Laboratory in Teddington, promises an uncoloured sound performance with 'optimal' bracing.

The drivers themselves are an ongoing evolution of a technology that Monitor Audio has been using for many years. Cooked up using C-CAM (Ceramic Coated Aluminium and Magnesium), the drivers take the form of a continuous profile dish with increasingly deep dimples in the edges, which are there to increase the rigidity of the cone without increasing the weight. As the 8in versions in the Silver 500 would lead to a centre speaker

that would be truly biblical in shape and size, the Silver 350C centre (£630 approx) uses the same midrange and tweeter arrangement but makes do with a pair of 6in drivers. Again, though, it's still a speaker that will require some installation consideration. Unlike the Silver 500s, which feature HiVe II ports on their rears, the centre enclosure is a sealed box.

This 6in driver is also used on the Silver FX surround speaker. Such models – designed specifically for surround/rear channel duties – are something of a rarity in this day and age, now that THX has largely left the home cinema building.

The half-a-hexagon form of the Silver FX is distinctive, and places its 6in six midbass at the front of the speaker with two 1in gold dome tweeters – used throughout the lineup – on either side at a 45-degree angle. Via a flick of a switch on the back panel, these can be set to work in phase (bipole) or out of phase (dipole) for a more diffuse sound. The thinking is that for 5.1 setups where the FX are mounted on a rear wall, they should run in bipole mode; switch to dipole operation for side positioning. Although Monitor Audio suggests experimenting with both to see which sound you prefer in your listening environment.

The brains of the operation

This is all very clever but Monitor Audio has been saving many of its best ideas for the Silver W-12 subwoofer. A serious piece of subwoofery in its own right (and available on its own for around £1,000), it packs a 12in C-CAM bass driver, powered by a 500W Class D amplifier. But there are brains here as well as brawn; the W-12 comes supplied with a microphone and can run an auto setup process to take into account room nodes and positioning (MA recommends taking three measurements). This data can then be used to alter the in-room performance of the sub via three modes, Music, Movie and Impact – the effects of which you can probably hazard a guess at. For people that don't run any EQ on the speakers themselves, being able to run it on the sub alone is rather handy.



Out of the box, the Silvers are big but Monitor Audio has worked hard to keep their bulk to a minimum. The Silver 500 manages to fit its 8in drivers into a cabinet that isn't significantly larger than rivals with smaller bass units, and the detailing (particularly the teardrop-styled tweeter/midrange housing) helps them avoid the *2001: A Space Odyssey* convention vibe that nagged me with KEF's Q Series (see *HCC* #280).

The build quality is also absolutely superb. The piano-black finish has been beautifully applied and these cabinets feel oh-so solid to the touch. I'm not wildly keen on some of the styling choices; the 'pixelated' tweeter cover looks a bit odd and the outrigger feet for the Silver 500 have a different fitting size to the speaker spikes so have to be used, which increases the footprint of this already large speaker even further. But on the whole,

'Build quality is absolutely superb – Monitor Audio's beautiful cabinets feel oh-so solid to the touch'

it feels like a lot of care has been lavished. Mounting a volume control and EQ selection button within the subwoofer's top plate is another example of smart thinking; plenty of woofers hide their buttonnry around the back, where it can often be inaccessible.

A little goes a long way

A key claim of this 5.1 package is impressive sensitivity. The front L/C/R speakers boast a 90dB figure (which MA says makes them 'amplifier friendly'), and it becomes apparent during listening that they are easy to drive. They need comparatively little power to hit enjoyable levels and are unlikely to prove too much of a challenge for any remotely price-comparable AV receiver.

This sensitivity works hand in hand with an overall sense of scale (and one that is apparent even at low listening levels). The duel between Peter Quill and Ego in *Guardians of the Galaxy: Vol 2* (Blu-ray) is reproduced with spine-tingling impact and a sense of the cavernous space inside the planet.

Each cabinet on the front soundstage can generate meaningful low-end extension in its own right, which adds another layer of scale. In addition, the dispersion of higher frequencies from MA's dome tweeters is very wide, giving effects an enveloping nature.

This soundstage depth, width and believability is readily apparent during other sequences. Step into the calculator's office in period NASA drama *Hidden Figures* (Blu-ray), and the MA system creates an appreciable space, conveying the positioning between the desks and the nature of the room itself. They are no less effective when used for broadcast TV, and as long as the mastering of what you are watching (or indeed listening to) is pretty good, they're hard to provoke. Very edgy material can have them sounding a little forward, but it isn't too severe.

The good news is that within all this space and scale is an excellent level of detail retrieval, making the attempt to flee through Alexanderplatz in *Atomic Blonde* (Blu-ray) scintillatingly immersive. The MA package treats you to the varied sounds of the crowd as the escapees move through,



4



and the cavalcade of umbrella clicks as the brollies go up is a perfect set of individual sounds rather than a single massive effect. The tonality here is also extremely good – anoraks like myself will delight in the clearly differentiated sounds of an Audi V8 and Porsche flat-six during *Atomic Blonde*'s chase from Berlin Airport.

In some ways, the most impressive member of the set is also the most unobtrusive. The Silver W-12 sub never feels (or looks) like a piece of demolition equipment, even considering its healthy output. Nor does its 'Impact' setting turn it into a foundation-worrying monster. The payoff, however, is that it's a device that can drop deep but remain in effortless control. Standard challenges for subs, like the pounding techno soundtrack of the Heroes Duty sequence in *Wreck-it Ralph* (Blu-ray), are handled with no bloat or overhang at any stage. After auto-calibration, the amount of correction the review sample applied from its front position in my listening room didn't appear huge, but I didn't doubt that MA's adjustment and onboard DSP was ensuring a tight grip on the system's LFE performance.

Much as the Silver 500 hides its mass relatively well, it needs plenty of space to reach its full potential. In my setup, this meant I ended up positioning the pair further

'Within the system's immersive space and scale is an excellent level of detail retrieval'

into the room than I traditionally do for most home cinema speakers. Of course, you can set the Silver 500s to 'small' in your AVR's EQ and let the Silver W-12 efficiently handle the very lowest frequencies, removing the likelihood of a muddy bottom-end. With a larger space, the scale and sensitivity of the Silver 500s is going to come into its own and their native bass response is likely to be easier to control.

Shy FX...

A slight disappointment with the Silver package is that the Silver FX, while effective in its own right and offering seamless front-to-back integration with the front three speakers, doesn't truly deliver a knockout blow over

SPECIFICATIONS

Silver 500

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 8in C-CAM bass drivers; 1 x 4in C-CAM mid-range driver; 1 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Bass-reflex with rear HiVe ports **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 30Hz-35kHz (-6dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 250W **DIMENSIONS:** 230(w) x 1,050(h) x 300(d)mm (excluding outrigger feet) **WEIGHT:** 22.8kg

Silver 350C

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6in C-CAM bass drivers; 1 x 4in C-CAM mid-range driver; 1 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 40Hz-35kHz (-6dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 200W **DIMENSIONS:** 560(w) x 235(h) x 240(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 14.9kg

Silver FX

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 6in C-CAM midbass driver; 2 x 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeters **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed; selectable dipole/bipole operation **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 60Hz-35kHz (-6dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 85W **DIMENSIONS:** 310(w) x 250(h) x 130(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 4.3kg

Silver W-12 (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in C-CAM woofer (triple suspension, 3in long-throw voice coil) **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE:** 20Hz-200Hz **ON BOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 500W **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 340(w) x 340(h) x 380(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 20.1kg **FEATURES:** Stereo line-level input/output; LFE input; mic-assisted auto calibration; Movie, Music and Impact EQ modes

PARTNER WITH



ATOMIC BLONDE: Charlize Theron continues to be the queen of action cinema with this enjoyable, fight-filled retro spy flick. Universal's Blu-ray (and Ultra HD BD – see p107) carries a DTS:X mix that revels in the 1980s music soundtrack.

a more conventional standmount speaker used in the same configuration. I didn't get the sense of a massive spread of sonic energy, and did wonder how MA's own Silver 100 standmounts might slot into the array, although like the rest of the pack the Silver FX is tonally accurate and has creditable low-end extension. Its discreet, wall-mountable nature is a huge draw, too.

And then there's the absence of any Atmos speaker in the Silver range, which, considering the plethora of 3D audio disc releases and the efforts of the competition – notably UK rival KEF – could be seen as a missed trick. Monitor Audio references its own in-ceiling units when discussing Atmos in the Silver brochure, but surely some buyers crave a simpler solution.

That aside, after time spent with the Monitor Audios, you won't want to see them leave. Their scale and nuanced handling of effects is first-rate, they're easy to drive, build quality is on the money, and they look the part, too. If you have the room – and especially desire a system where surround speakers can be installed surreptitiously – the Silver 500 pack will unquestionably deliver the goods ■

2. MA's outrigger feet can be fitted with spikes for use on carpeted floors

3. The Silver FX run in either dipole or bipole mode – just flick their back-panel switch

4. Controls on the W-12's top handle volume and EQ mode selection

HCC VERDICT



Monitor Audio Silver 500 5.1

→ £3,650 → www.monitoraudio.co.uk

WE SAY: These sizable cabinets deliver a largescale sound and should be an easy match for your AVR. Well-controlled LFE and discreet surrounds boost their appeal.

JVC's latest projector doesn't rewrite any rule books, but small improvements still make **John Archer** happy

Take a walk on the dark side



It used to be fairly easy to predict what each new generation of JVC projector would give you. A bit more brightness, even more contrast, and maybe a new calibration tool or two. It's starting to look, though, as if JVC has gone as far as it can in contrast and brightness terms with its proprietary D-ILA projection tech. The new X5900 claims the same 1,800 Lumens brightness and 400,000:1 dynamic contrast ratio figures delivered by its predecessor, the X5500.

This home cinema beamer also enjoys precisely the same serious but attractive design, and uses the same 265W lamp. Plus, like the X5500, it features what might be called a 'pseudo' 4K resolution, rather than the full 3,840 x

2,160 McCoy, via JVC's e-Shift system. This places two 1080p chipsets in sequence, diagonally offset by half a pixel. This creates an image with essentially twice as many pixels as a standard 1080p one, with JVC's Multiple Pixel Control (MPC) processing joining the images together to deliver a 4K effect. The

e-Shift system can work with either native 4K material or native HD sources, although JVC claims processing improvements introduced for the X5900 reflect the growing availability of 4K content.

Other updates for this PJ include refinements to JVC's Clear Motion engine for reducing blur and judder; a useful entry in the projector's menus that shows an HDR source's maximum content light level (peak luminance) and maximum average light level settings; and manual gamma setting adjustments you can use in conjunction with the projector's auto-calibration system.

The X5900's connections are all found on the projector's rear. Both HDMI inputs support data flows up to 18Gbps, enabling them to play 12-bit, 4K/60p and 4:4:4 chroma subsampling images. It would be good to see Sony's 4K projectors following JVC's lead in this respect.

This is a dream to set up. Zoom, focus and image shift are all motorised, with plenty of precise flexibility. The remote control is helpfully laid out and brightly backlit, while the menus are straightforward once you've familiarised yourself with the occasional bit of jargon.

Getting a Shift on

I was struck by how much cleaner and more convincing JVC's e-Shift 4K effect is here than I've seen it looking before. During an early sequence in *Oblivion*, where Jack flies over the planet surface looking for a damaged droid, there's practically no sign (with either the HD or 4K versions of the film) of the gentle noise that I've noticed in detailed or subtly toned areas of the same sequence with previous e-Shift iterations. This immediately makes the image look more natural and involving.

The latest e-Shift improvements also benefit detail. While e-Shift has always made HD look more dense, with native 4K sources it's always come up short of the crisp, immaculate and detailed appearance such content enjoys on Sony's native 4K projectors. With the X5900, though, e-Shift closes the gap considerably.

With the 4K Blu-ray of *Lucy*, for instance, pore and blemish detail on Scarlet Johansson's face during extreme close-ups is more readily apparent. The reduction in noise mentioned earlier helps to 'sell' e-Shift's resolution-enhancing qualities, too. It all adds up to a sense of the enhanced depth and space associated with the best 4K images. To be clear, however, shots across the city in *Lucy* do still lack that absolutely pristine look you get with native 4K displays.

When there's motion in the frame, clarity remains tangible thanks to the improved Clear Motion Drive/Motion Enhance settings. Previously I've tended to turn these features off, but here, on their default settings, they really help retain the image's 4K-like sharpness during action-packed scenes without generating unwanted side effects. ➤

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
High-contrast, 4K scaling projector with HDR playback

POSITION:
JVC's entry-level projector

PEERS:
Epson EH-TW9300;
Optoma UHZ65;
Sony VPL-VW260ES



1. JVC has retained its familiar chassis design

2. The handset offers a nicely bright backlight





3

Nor does the image look unnaturally fluid with the Blur Reduction options set to their lowest levels.

The most unexpected improvement yielded by JVC's revamped processing finds the X5900 faring much better both at avoiding clipping (loss of subtle shading and detailing) in bright image areas, and delivering more subtle greyscale detailing in dark picture areas.

With all previous JVC PJs, their lack of brightness has been too profound to make HDR feel consistently convincing; dark areas have looked over-dominant and hollow, while bright areas have veered towards flat and empty. On the X5900, HDR material generally appears more well-balanced and natural.

I should stress at this point that HDR here bears little resemblance to HDR on a high-quality TV. The projector's 1,800 Lumens of maximum light output can't rival the explosive dynamism and lifelike light levels associated with flatscreen HDR. But you do get a sense that you're seeing a more dynamic image than you get with SDR content. Furthermore, baseline brightness doesn't appear heavily depressed in order to create enough breathing room at the other end of the spectrum. HDR pictures no longer look routinely darker than their regular counterparts.

Nit-picking

The PJs lack of brightness is rather exposed by content that's been mastered to an extreme peak light level (usually 4,000 nits). Such dynamic HDR grading – as used, for instance, on the 4K Blu-ray of *Pan* – can see objects framed by a much brighter backdrop looking so dark they almost become silhouettes. When Peter stands in front of the windows of Blackbeard's ship, he doesn't look like a fully realised, natural part of the picture. Night scenes in *Pan*'s forest and mine locations also suffer with crushing of shadow details in the darkest areas. The X5900 fares better with gentler HDR sources. *Dunkirk*, which tops out at just 323 nits, and deploys a maximum frame-average light level (FALL) of just 144 nits, appears terrifically well-balanced.

The X5900 is an excellent colour performer. It's capable of delivering the entire range of the DCI-P3 colour space used in commercial digital cinemas (and which forms the basis of the expanded colour range found on most 4K Blu-rays), and it's capable of doing this with impressive

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active **4K:** No. 1,920 x 1,080 image processing/3,840 x 2,160 pixels projected **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs (both v2.0); 12V trigger port; Ethernet control port; RS232; 3D sync **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 1,800 Lumens **CONTRAST (CLAIMED):** Native 40,000:1; Dynamic 400,000:1 **DIMENSIONS:** 455(w) x 179(h) x 472(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 15.4kg

FEATURES: D-ILA projector; e-Shift 5 pseudo 4K technology; claimed 21dB running noise in Low lamp mode; 4,500 hours claimed lamp-life in Low lamp mode; Clear Motion processing; auto HDR detection; +/- 80% vertical and +/-34% horizontal image shifting; backlit remote; auto-calibration with optional external sensor

PARTNER WITH



DATACOLOR SPYDER5 PRO:

This £150 optical sensor, which fine-tunes gamma, colour and colour temp, is compatible with JVC's downloadable (Windows/Mac) auto-calibration software, as is the company's pricier (£200) Elite model.

accuracy and authority. Obviously it would be better if the X5900 had more luminance on tap to help it ram home the wider colour ranges associated with most HDR content. But even as it stands the X5900's colour response is good enough to make you feel like you're watching a true 'next generation' image.

The X5900 also looks nothing short of resplendent with any decent-quality standard dynamic range source you throw at it. Colours are beautifully nuanced and natural. Black levels are pretty much perfect, and far beyond anything any rival projection technology can deliver. Details look crisp and clean, underlining the new-found skills of the latest e-Shift system. Motion is believable, and standard dynamic range images are bright and punchy.

The JVC's run of form even extends to 3D. Issues with crosstalk (double ghosting) that have plagued many previous JVC projectors have been largely dealt with, leaving you with crisp, immersive 3D visuals only let down by the way they project much darker than 2D images.

The X5900 wraps up a mostly excellent performance by running reasonably quietly. You can barely hear it at all when watching SDR using the Low lamp option, and while the cooling fans do clearly run harder with HDR and 3D, the sound is smooth and consistent enough to let your brain tune it out.

Compelling contender

The £4,000 price puts the X5900 between Epson's LCD-based 4K scaling TW9300 (£3,000) and Sony's VPL-VW260ES (£5,200). Both have their merits – the former for its brightness, that latter for its native 4K playback. This JVC is peerless for its money, however, with the all-important matter of black level. Add in processing tweaks that deliver improved HDR and pseudo 4K abilities and you've got JVC's most compelling entry-level PJ for generations ■

HCC VERDICT



JVC DLA-X5900

→ £4,000 → www.jvc.co.uk

WE SAY: Much improved processing joins class-leading black levels to deliver JVC's most compelling and current-feeling mid-range projector since the arrival of 4K.

3. The X5900's HDMI inputs cater to 18Gbps data rates

"stunningly good"
-avforums.com



"A superior-sounding, movie mad speaker system
offering serious value for money"
-Home Cinema Choice



"AMAZING"
-Trustedreviews.com



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Vincent Teoh treats his peepers to the visual delights of Sony's monster 100in 4K HDR TV

**HOME
CINEMA**
Choice
REFERENCE STATUS



SEND HELP!
Head outdoors with true-life survival thriller *Jungle*, p95

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
100in full-array
backlit 4K LED TV

POSITION:
Sony's biggest and
most premium screen

PEERS:
Samsung QE88Q9F;
4K HDR projector/
screen combi

'Look at the size of that thing!'

No AV enthusiast has ever gone to heaven regretting they bought too big a telly, and TVs don't come much bigger and better than Sony's 100in ZD9. The Bravia ZD9 series was launched in the second half of 2016, and while we've reviewed the 65in model (*HCC #267*), it's not until now that we've had the chance to put this 100in beast through its paces. At £60,000, it's out of reach for your average punter, but then again, the same can be said about Ferraris. And everyone wants a Ferrari.

The Sony KD-100ZD9 features a native 4K resolution of 3,840 x 2,160; full-array local dimming direct-lit LED backlight technology; the company's X1 Extreme video processor; HDR support for the open-standard HDR10, broadcast HLG (Hybrid Log-Gamma) and soon, via a firmware update, Dolby Vision formats; and the Android Nougat (7.0) smart TV platform.

Besides being super-sized and super-heavy (obviously), the design of the panel itself is no different from its smaller siblings, with a black bezel, champagne-gold side trim and grid-patterned rear. The screen is held up at both ends by a floor stand, but you can also choose to place the 100in ZD9 on a table-top stand (included in the box) or wall-mount it via an optional bracket. Just make sure you have a strong enough AV rack or wall to carry at least 118kg of heft.

Unlike the smaller 65in and 75in models which are mass-produced, 100in ZD9s are hand-built in Japan by the same group of select engineers, so you can expect first-rate build quality. Ironical, then, that the supplied remote control is still the same 2016 version with minimally raised faux-buttons, and is not the easiest to use in the dark.

The full monty

Sony's ZD9 range is equipped with full-array local dimming (FALD), which is generally acknowledged as the backlighting method that delivers the best picture quality with LED LCD screens. With FALD, the screen is segmented into different zones, each of which can be illuminated or switched off independently of one another, contributing to a significantly higher contrast performance.

With FALD systems, the number of zones and the dimming algorithm both matter to the final outcome in terms of lighting precision and appearance of side effects such as blooming or luminance fluctuations. And I'm pleased to report that the 100in screen on the ZD9 represents the perfect canvas on which Sony TV

engineers can produce their greatest work.

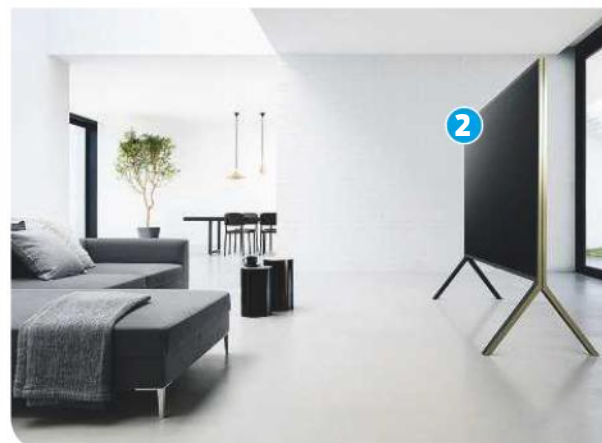
Playing a specialised test pattern in a darkened room, I counted at least 1,000 individually dimmable zones, comfortably the highest on any LCD-based display to date. And with Sony's extremely well-implemented local dimming algorithm, I saw virtually no light leakage surrounding bright elements against

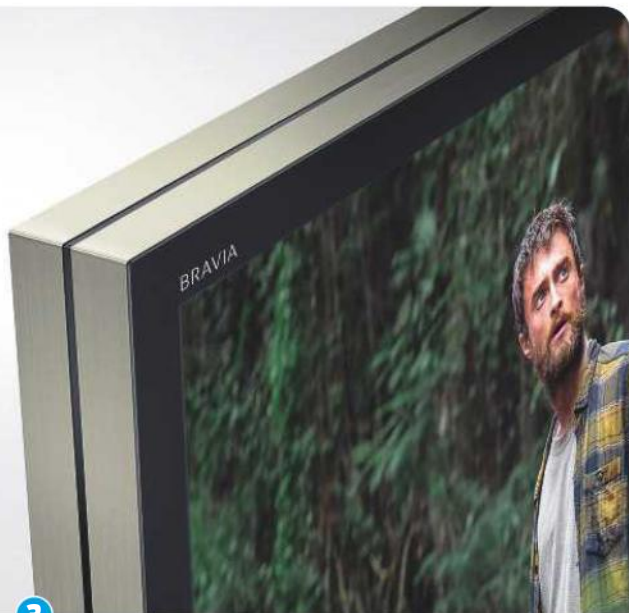
a dark background when sat directly in front of the TV. In most scenes, black-level expression was essentially as deep as OLED's, although the latter still holds the upper hand in star fields (for example in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, Blu-ray), owing to the self-emissive display technology's pixel-level illumination control.

The Sony KD-100ZD9 has another record-breaking talent up its sleeve, namely HDR peak brightness. For the uninitiated, some Ultra HD Blu-rays are mastered to 4,000 nits, and the closer a display can get to that level of light output, the higher the chance it has of faithfully reproducing bright highlight details and HDR impact. I measured peak brightness on the 100in Sony ZD9 to be 2,800 nits on a 10 per cent window. To put this number into context, the next brightest consumer TVs are the 65in and 75in ZD9s at 1,800 nits, the Samsung KS9500 at 1,600 nits, and the Sony XE93 at 1,400 nits (all properly calibrated and measured using my ISF-certified toolkit).

Fellow *HCC* scribe Jon Thompson once told me, 'You haven't really seen HDR until you've watched *Chappie* on a Dolby Pulsar [a 4,000-nit mastering monitor]'. Well, >

1, 2. Wall-mounted or floor-mounted, Sony's 100in ZD9 cuts an imposing figure...





SPECIFICATIONS

3D: Yes. Active shutter **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG; Dolby Vision (firmware pending) **TUNER:** Freeview HD; satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB; Scart; composite input; Ethernet; headphone output; optical digital audio output **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 2 x 10W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 2,258(w) x 1,303(h) x 98(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 118.6kg

FEATURES: Master Backlight Drive direct-lit LED with full-array local dimming; 4K HDR X1 Extreme processor; Triluminos Display; Motionflow XR 1200Hz; Android TV; YouView EPG/catch-up apps

PARTNER WITH



DALI PHANTOM S SERIES: Mount the Sony on a wall, and while you're there, fit some premium in-wall speakers to add a surround sound experience fit to match its lush visuals. DALI's super-sized S-280s sell for £2,500 each.

the Sony KD-100ZD9 will get its lucky owner closer to this HDR nirvana than any other consumer TV (or projector, for that matter) currently available. The profound sense of impact and immersion granted by 2,800 nits of deliverable brightness on a 100in screen simply cannot be overstated, with reflections off objects carrying the correct light intensity and directionality to help you better perceive depth... just like in real life.

Such a high peak brightness also injects vigour into colour volume – the flames in *The Revenant* (4K Blu-ray) burn with a degree of formidable ferocity seldom seen on sub-1,000-nit displays. While the 100ZD9's colours

'No consumer projector can begin to compete with the 100in ZD9 in terms of sheer HDR impact and accuracy'

in general are not as explosively brilliant as that of quantum-dot-infused Samsung QLEDs, they maintain their saturation in brighter sequences better than rival OLED TVs, which are hampered by Automatic Brightness Limited (ABL), a protective circuitry implemented on self-emissive displays to better manage power and prevent overheating as a larger screen area gets brighter.

Video processing and motion handling are equally excellent on the Bravia KD-100ZD9. I've always rated Sony's X1 Extreme processor as the best in-TV scaler on the market today, and it works wonderfully to upscale HD material – even from the ropey end of the compression scale – to fill the 100in screen, retaining crispness and detail without introducing excessive ringing or fizziness. I found I could sit as near as ten feet to the TV to satisfy my field of view and retain a thrillingly immersive viewing experience without noticing visible scaling/compression artefacts for most sources.

Even without the TV's Motionflow processing enabled, the 100ZD9 presents slow-panning shots in 24fps movies, such as the opening camera trawl across Mars in *The Martian* (Blu-ray), with an assured authority that's free

of judder. And, as with its 4K upscaling, Motionflow is a best-in-breed system. If you feel the urge to improve motion clarity, it incurs less interpolation artefacts (e.g. shimmering around players, or the ball breaking up as it travels through the crowd, during a football game) than other TV brands.

The ZD9 has another feather in its cap, and one that's more and more rare – 3D playback. It's of the active-shutter flavour, and Sony has been generous enough to include two pairs of 3D glasses, although possibly due to increased screen brightness, there's more flicker and crosstalk than I'd like to see over a two-hour movie.

An input lag measurement of 63ms is not the most responsive, but at least you'll be experiencing your Xbox One X or PS4 Pro games on a stunning 100in 4K HDR canvas.

Tour de force

With its 2,800 nits of peak brightness and 1,000 local dimming zones, the Sony KD-100ZD9 is an HDR *tour de force*, and it's no slouch at handling more widely available hi-def content, either.

At 100 inches (not to mention an eye-watering price of £60,000), the 100ZD9's main competition actually comes from projectors rather than TVs. Of course, you can buy a projector that throws up a 100in image or even larger for as cheap as a few hundred quid, but no consumer projector – not even the 5,000 Lumen, £65,000 Sony VPL-VW5000ES – can deliver enough light output to even begin to compete with the KD-100ZD9 in terms of sheer HDR impact and accuracy.

Factor in the TV's versatility for use during daytime in a bright room (compared with a projector), and suddenly its price tag of £60,000 doesn't seem that outrageous ■

HCC VERDICT



Sony KD-100ZD9

→ £60,000 → www.sony.co.uk

WE SAY: If you have the space in your cinema room and the money in your wallet, the Sony KD-100ZD9 is a reference screen that does 4K HDR justice.

3. The 100in variants of Sony's ZD9 TVs are hand-built in Japan

VPL-VW760ES

- NEW Native 4K HDR LASER Projector
- 4K Resolution: 4096 x 2160
- Laser Light Source
- 2000 ANSI Lumen Brightness

- Up to 20,000 Hours Maintenance Free
- HDR Compatibility
- Exceptional Dynamic Contrast
- Demos Now Available In The UK

The UHZ65 trades an old-fashioned lamp for something more cutting-edge. **Steve May** approves

Laser throws new light on 4K

Black level performance, colour vibrancy and raw resolution are widely recognised as the holy trinity of home cinema projection, and with the new 4K HDR-capable UHZ65, Optoma comes close to giving movie fans a suitably religious experience. An early champion of single-chip 4K DLP cinema, the brand has swapped the traditional lamp for a laser phosphor light source, and in the process significantly upped the performance ante.

Laser light ushers in a number of bigscreen benefits. Most obviously there's near-instant on and maintenance-free longevity. Optoma quotes 20,000 hours usage, which is basically going to be the lifetime of the product. You'll never have to worry about replacement bulbs.

Moving to a laser phosphor light source also helps image quality, bringing improvements in contrast and colour fidelity. So is it time for a hallelujah chorus?

Plug 'n' play cinema

The Batcave-black UHZ65 is relatively modest in size (under 50cm wide) and proves reasonably straightforward to install. There are manual zoom and vertical lens shift controls under its hinged top lid. A green test pattern offers an easy gauge of focus and uniformity.

The projector's throw should suit most rooms. You can cast a 120in image from just under 4m; the projector will focus between 1.3m to 9.3m.

Video inputs comprise two HDMI and VGA. While the projector has a modest onboard 4W sound system, there's an optical digital output and minijack stereo in/out, to route sound to something more meaningful (we obviously suggest partnering your sources direct to an AV receiver, for fittingly big surround sound).

There's also a USB port, not for media playback but to provide power to an HDMI dongle. Control options include a 12V trigger (to sync with an electric screen), RS232 and Ethernet.

The remote is the standard ergonomic Optoma backlit zapper, which lights up bright white. Alternatively you can use the on-body menu control; on the projector's flank are manual

power and input buttons. The onscreen user interface is a familiar, unfussy box of tabs and menus.

So how does a laser phosphor light engine differ from a traditional lamp? Let's dig a little deeper...

Blue laser diodes provide the light source that illuminates the Optoma's DLP chip. These shine through a phosphor wheel and diffusion window onto a four-segment (blue, green, yellow and red) filter wheel, before hitting the DMD.

In full flight, the picture performance of the UHZ65 is on the right side of gorgeous. The image is tack-sharp. Like its UHD65 stablemate (see *HCC* #278), the projector is built around TI's XPR (eXpanded Pixel Resolution) DMD. This

may not be a native 4K device (it has 4.15million mirrors, after all), but advanced image processing delivers

a 2160p image to the screen, approved by the CTA (Consumer Technology Association) as 4K.

To be honest, I think you'd be hard-pressed to identify the image wasn't from a native 4K projector using movie content alone. It's only when you scrutinise a UHD test chart will you spot that it's not peerless at cleanly delivering the very highest level of UHD detail.

A subtle UltraDetail enhancement mode can be used to give a visible lift to low-level detail, and (on Level 1) it works well viewed at distance.

Operating noise is a tad high at 29dB, and fiddling with the brightness setting doesn't reap any dramatic reward. Of course, as part of a full home cinema install, this isn't likely to be a huge problem – but I have heard significantly quieter projectors.

I was occasionally aware of DLP's characteristic rainbow fringing on sequences with high contrast. This has been less of an issue ➤



1. Optoma has still left the '3D' button on its handset...

2. The UHZ65 is dressed to impress in home cinema black

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
4K DLP HDR
projector with laser
light source

POSITION:
Range-topping UHD
projector

PEERS:
Acer VL7860;
JVC DLA-X5900

2





on DLP projectors of late, but here makes a surprise reprise. It was immediately evident on the home menu screen of my Panasonic DMP-UB900 UHD player, which is fairly monochromatic. Thankfully, chroma fringing is far less obvious with actual movie footage.

One weakness of the lamp-based DLP UHD projectors seen so far has been contrast. As hoped for, that's been tackled here head on. While the PJ still can't manage the stygian black of some rivals, it is far more convincing than on Optoma's more affordable models. This has a knock-on effect on practically everything you're watching; letterbox bars are appreciably noir rather than grey; dark colours gain extra realism; the sense of image depth improves.

While HDR from projectors is no match for TVs when it comes to portraying spectral highlights, this Optoma (compatible with HDR10, but not Dolby Vision, HDR10+ or HLG) at least offers a lush vibrancy. With a brightness of 3,000 Lumens there's enough ping in the picture to

'Ultra HD content is obviously this Optoma's strength, but image quality with 1080p sources is good too'

create a genuinely dynamic image, and colour depth is excellent. When *The Rock* rescues wife Emma from the top of a collapsing building (*San Andreas*, UHD Blu-ray), the red and white livery of his rescue chopper is bright and rich. The facades of the collapsing buildings glint realistically in the sun, while fountains of flame illustrate the chaos. It's a very dramatic presentation.

When HDR is detected, the projector locks to its HDR setting (other options are Cinema, HDR Sim(ulated), Game, Reference, Bright and User) and cannot be changed, although you can tweak image parameters such as brightness and contrast, and choose from Detail, Standard or Film dynamic range modes.

With standard dynamic range content, the Cinema preset is a fine option for a darkened room; while you might be tempted to call up the HDR Sim mode to make the most of the PJ's specification, this over-cranks colour and generally makes SDR images look unnatural.

This unit sports Optoma's PureEngine processing suite, which offers a variety of embellishments. Its PureMotion element works to smooth out panning shots, but applies a soap opera sheen, while PureColor bumps saturation.

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10 **CONNECTIONS:** 2 x HDMI inputs (1 x HDMI 2.0 with HDCP 2.2; 1 x HDMI v1.4a); USB-A (power); 12V trigger; RS232; Ethernet; 3.5mm audio input; 3.5mm audio output; VGA input; optical digital audio output **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 3,000 Lumens **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 2,000,000:1 **ZOOM:** 1.6x **DIMENSIONS:** 498(w) x 141(h) x 331(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 9.5kg

FEATURES: 4K XPR UHD DLP; built-in 4W audio; laser light engine (rated to 20,000 hours); claimed 29dB fan noise; Cinema, HDR, HDR Sim, Game, Reference and Bright picture presets; 1.39:1-2.22:1 throw ratio; PureEngine image processing includes PureMotion frame interpolation; ISF calibration compatible; backlit remote control; vertical lens shift

PARTNER WITH



AMAZON FIRE TV: You can make use of the UHZ65's SDR-locked second HDMI input with this £80 media streaming dongle. Use the PJ's USB port to supply power to the Fire TV and you have an elegant solution for on-demand content.

Adjustable on a gauge between 0-6, I found 1 was enough to get adequate pop. Any more and you start to blow out detail. PureContrast should be left on.

The UHZ65 may be *sans* lamp, but there are adjustable brightness modes. Dynamic Black 1 is the most satisfying. The laser engine is driven by default at 100 per cent, but can be lowered in increments to 50 per cent. However, as this doesn't noticeably impact the projector's operating noise, it's best left on full pelt.

4K content is obviously this PJ's strength, but image quality with HD sources is good too. *Star Trek Discovery* (1080p, Netflix) is astoundingly crisp, with remarkable detail in the crew's spandex jumpsuits. The show provides plenty of opportunities to show off colour depth too, from the bridge of the Discovery to Klingon armour.

Given that only one HDMI input is 4K/HDCP 2.2 compatible (a bit of a disappointment), you might well wonder what to do with the second. I connected an Amazon Fire TV dongle and powered it from the projector's USB port. Of course, you're largely limited to watching with compromised sound doing this. While the projector can route audio out, stereo is the best you'll get.

A new level

The UHZ65 represents a new level in single-chip 4K DLP performance (outside of SIM2's premium Nero 4 UHD), but the £5,000 ticket puts it up against stiff competition from Epson and JVC – the latter's DLA-X5900 (see p44) offers better blacks, connectivity and setup flexibility, but loses out on brightness and resolution, while the promise here of maintenance-free UHD imagery is a huge draw. Overall, this is a cracking, credible high-end home cinema projector. I suspect once you've gone laser, you'll not want to go back ■

3. Only one of the Optoma's HDMI inputs supports 4K HDR

HCC VERDICT



Optoma UHZ65

→ £5,000 → www.optoma.co.uk

WE SAY: Offering strong contrast, rich colours and crisp detail, this laser 4K debutant is a step forward in DLP home cinema projection technology. Not a budget option, though.



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SETC240WSF-ATR	2340 x 1320	92" x 52"	2935 x 155 x 170	16:9
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Richard Stevenson wonders if he should go 5.1.4 or 7.1.2 with this nine-channel AVR

Dressed up to the nines

With Dolby Atmos, DTS:X and Auro-3D, Marantz's SR7012 is one of the latest receivers to boast this trio of sonic processing suites straight out of the box. One step down and £1,000 cheaper than the brand's flagship AVR, could this £1,700 model be the sweet spot for object-based audio value?

Well, sort of. With a suggested price ticket still knocking on the door of two grand (although you may find it for less at retailers), I was a little disappointed to see this AVR has only nine channels of amplification. If you are setting up for something like 5.1.4 or the Auro equivalent, it's good to go. To make full use of its 11-channel processing you will need an additional stereo power amp.

With that gripe out of the way, the rest of the spec sheet is AVR trumps gold. In addition to the headline processing, the SR7012 will get both DTS Virtual:X and eARC as firmware updates later this year. The former promises object-based height projection from basic 5.1 or 7.1 speaker setups; the latter delivers object-based audio data back down from your TV.

Audyssey's flagship MultEQ XT room EQ software is integrated, and for a £20 fee you can download Audyssey's MultEQ Editor app, too. This gets you pretty much the full range of tools that were bundled as the much pricier Audyssey Pro Kit for installers.

For video, the SR7012 stocks an 8-in/3-out suite of HDMI 2.0 connections with Dolby Vision/HLG HDR passthrough (presumably okay with HDR10+, too). Should you still have legacy HD and even SD (tsk, tsk) sources, there is scaling to 4K from any video input.

Onboard amplification is touted at a very respectable 125W per channel (8 ohms, two-channel, 20Hz-20kHz), or an even more impressive 200W under a less rigorous measurement. With a nod to Marantz's audiophile heritage, all nine channels use the company's Hyper Dynamic Amp Modules (HDAMs), as found on the brand's Reference series hi-fi separates. The circuit boards bristle with what Marantz describes as 'high-grade' components, and there's a Pure Direct mode that bypasses all but essential circuits for optimal performance.

Audio credentials are enhanced by 32-bit DACs and decoding for any format from humble MP3 right up to DSD and other flavours of hi-res. Strip out the AV gubbins and the SR7012 would make a very fine stereo amplifier.

Bluetooth, Wi-Fi or hardwired Ethernet connections enable a strong slate of networked features, encompassing internet radio, streaming services, Apple's AirPlay and, via a firmware update in the first half of 2018, Amazon Alexa control. Which us brings us neatly to an interesting feature of the SR7012; full HEOS support. As HEOS is very much Denon's networked multiroom audio baby, could this move signify closer integration of the Denon and Marantz brands under their recent new owners Sound United? Discuss.

Familiar setup

The step-by-step connection wizard looks remarkably like the one we saw on Denon's AVR X6400H (HCC #280), and a similar penchant for either Dolby/DTS or Auro speaker configurations. You need to choose one and stick with it.

The Marantz's setup will be familiar to anyone versed in the Audyssey measurement process. Hold fire, however. If you plan to use the Audyssey Editor App, you need to run the setup from the app rather than the AVR's remote and GUI. While the Audyssey measurement and number-crunching is still done within the AVR, the app then uploads the data back to your smart device during the measurement process.

I'll be covering the Audyssey Editor App in more detail in a future issue, as it's worthy of investigation. There is oodles of data, along with a plethora of target curves and adjustments to be fettled with. You can save many different setups and download them to the AVR as required. Different setups for different genres of film? No problem. The system also shows an

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Nine-channel
3D audio AVR

POSITION:
Below the 11-channel
SR8012, and
Marantz's separates

PEERS:
Yamaha RX-A2070;
Denon AVR-X4400H;
Onkyo TX-RZ1100

1. The brand is still rocking that porthole front-panel design

2. Marantz's handset is easy to master



in-room frequency response for each channel before and after Audyssey EQ. The 'after' curves shown in my setup were ambitiously flat compared to measurements using an independent RTA system.

No matter, though, because the SR7012 sounds pretty darn fine. Simply playing music to warm up for the main movie event is immediately impressive. The sound is clean, controlled and with the sort of expansive imaging that a stereo integrated amplifier would be proud of.

Firing up the other seven channels with Dolby Atmos material demonstrates an equally smooth and refined performance. There is no overt colouration to the sound that would give it a stand-out feature, like aggressive bass or frisky treble, just a well-balanced, even-handed approach to film mixes.

Tom Cruise's distinctive tone is perfectly captured in *The Mummy* (Blu-ray). Subtler sequences are nicely enveloping and cosset you within the atmosphere of the scene. Early in the film, dialogue and ambient effects effortlessly put you in a large military transport plane. Set up as 7.1.2, I certainly missed only having two overheads for the Atmos mix, but it wasn't a deal breaker.

As the action goes into overdrive about 10 seconds later, the Marantz picks up the pace. It peppers the room with detail and the LFE throb of a plane spiralling out of control. The roar of wind from the large hole in the fuselage rotates around my cinema, even if the sound of actors thumping into walls is far more Hollywood than reality.

It's only when you start to get enthusiastic with the volume control during such chaotic audio scenes does the Marantz start to falter. With all channels driven it struggles to hit big SPL numbers. The sound stays remarkably solid and stable up to around 90 per cent of its full volume range, but you will likely see that figure if you want to scale to 100dB peak in-room. When I edged higher, I found the sound getting a whole lot harder through the mid-range, begging you to back it down.

A foray into using a 5.1.4 speaker setup arguably suited the Marantz even better than 7.1.2. It added more height detail and made the soundstage feel more expansive at lower volumes too. Dense scenes within the City of a Thousand Planets, from *Valerian...* (4K BD) are suitably warm and stifling. Each neighbourhood is filled with its own charm, the Marantz missing little in bringing both the earthy grime and vibrancy to the film's soundscape.

SPECIFICATIONS

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes **DTS:X:** Yes (plus DTS Virtual:X via later firmware) **THX:** No **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** Yes, 7.1-channel **MULTICHANNEL PREOUT:** Yes, 11.2 phono **MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** 9 x 125W (into 8 ohms) **MULTIROOM:** Yes, Zone 2 **AV INPUTS:** 4 x composite; 4 x digital audio (2 x optical and 2 x coaxial) **HDMI:** Yes, 8 x inputs; 3 x outputs **COMPONENT VIDEO:** Yes, 2 x inputs; 1 x output **VIDEO UPSCALING:** Yes, To 4K. **DIMENSIONS:** 440(w) x 410(d) x 185(h)mm **WEIGHT:** 14.2kg

FEATURES: Auto-3D out of the box; Audyssey MultEQ XT; optional Audyssey Editor app; ISF video calibration; Marantz Remote app; Amazon Alexa Control (early-mid 2018); eARC (early-mid 2018); Apple AirPlay; HEOS multiroom compatible; Ethernet; Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; USB; dual subwoofer outputs; Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Modules (HDAMs); MDAX2 compressed audio enhancer

PARTNER WITH



AUDYSSEY MULTEQ EDITOR:

For £20, you can add this app to your smart device and enjoy greater control over the Marantz's Audyssey EQ functions – before and after calibration results provide insight into your room's specific characteristics.

In general, the Marantz acquits itself as a solid and sophisticated performer, if not an all-action monster. My *Fifth Element* 4K UHD reference Atmos disc is perfectly accurate and enjoyable but, when the scenes hot up, this does lack that last degree of grunt compared to more potent AVRs.

With Denon's AVR-X6400H still fresh in mind, the Marantz delivers a fair bit less scale and space, yet its smooth balance and less muscular power may be the better bet for smaller speaker packages and systems. Add to this the formidable feature set and stellar performance with stereo music, and Marantz' SR7012 is warmly recommended ■

HCC VERDICT



Marantz SR7012

→ £1,700 → www.marantz.co.uk

WE SAY: No powerhouse AVR but the SR7012 impresses with its extensive feature set and smooth, sophisticated sound with movies and music.



3. Unlike Denon's X6400H, the SR7012 retains a 7.1-channel analogue input for legacy sources



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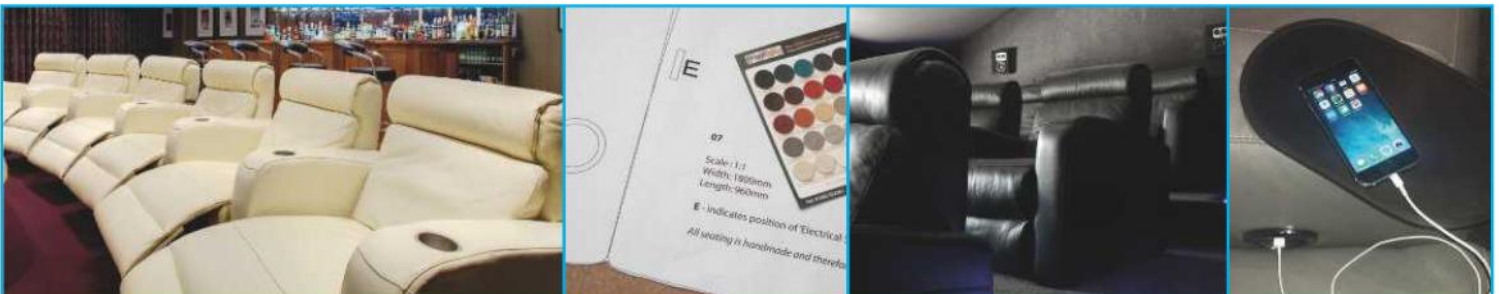


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Daylight warrior

Samsung's most affordable QLED TV has to compete with similarly priced OLED sets and the brand's own step-down LED models. But it has a secret weapon, reckons **John Archer**

SAMSUNG'S FIRST WAVES of QLED TVs haven't proved quite the all-conquering heroes I'd hoped for. Their pre-launch promise of OLED-challenging viewing angles didn't ultimately come to pass, and the lack of any models with direct backlighting has increasingly looked like a flat-out mistake.

The 55in QE55Q7F, though, is a welcome reminder ahead of the arrival of Samsung's 2018 screens of why the brand has worked so hard to make QLED happen.

360-degree design

This is a divine-looking TV. Its screen is surrounded by the trimmest of silvery frames, and the rear panel's ultra-minimalist, smooth finish delivers a classic '360-degree' design. It all feels beautifully built, and the clean lines aren't spoiled by cabling thanks to Samsung's usual external connections box that hooks up to the set via a single, ultra-thin, almost transparent cable.

The box has the expected quota of physical connections (four HDMI, three USBs, optical audio output and Ethernet), while also delivering Wi-Fi and Bluetooth support. Note that the latter provides your only headphone option.

The Q7F series differs from Samsung's Q9F flagship models by being 500-600 nits less bright, and using a vertically-firing edge LED system rather than a horizontal one. Furthermore, it differs from the Q8C range by not having a curved screen, and by deploying a less refined local dimming system for the LEDs along its bottom edge. Its measured peak brightness of around 1,170 nits on a 10 per cent white window is slightly down on that of the equivalent Q8C model, but is still comfortably above the 1,000 nits generally considered best for a premium HDR screen.

As well as the HDR10 industry standard format, the QE55Q7F handles the HDR10+ system recently made available on Amazon streams, and now claiming support from the Fox and Warner Bros studios. This adds a layer of dynamic metadata to the HDR stream, essentially providing the TV with more accurate instructions on how to handle incoming images.

Also supported is the broadcast-focused HLG format. This works over HDMI and streaming, so you can watch *Blue Planet II* in HDR via the BBC iPlayer app.

The QE55Q7F uses the same Tizen-based smart TV system sported by most other Samsung TVs. This delivers

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
4K LED TV with edge lighting, local dimming and QLED technology

POSITION:
Entry-level QLED TV from Samsung

PEERS:
Samsung UE55MU9000; LG OLED55B7

a tidy, mostly logical interface and apps galore – including 4K HDR versions of Netflix, Amazon and YouTube.

Light of my life

Considering the reasonable asking price, the QE55Q7F's pictures are mostly outstanding. In particular, I am stunned by how watchable they are in a brightly-lit living room.

A combination of the way Samsung QLED's metal-clad Quantum Dots can be driven harder than normal QDs, and an ambient light-eating screen filter, means bright 4K HDR sequences, such as when Spider-Man is locked inside a bright warehouse in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (Ultra HD Blu-ray) appear as dramatically punchy as if you were viewing them in a blacked-out cinema room.

Darker sequences impress too. When Spidey is rescued from a lake at night by Iron Man, black levels still look excellent; you can make out scads of detail in the darkest corners; and there are remarkably few reflections from windows, lights or your sun-drenched furniture standing between you and the onscreen action.

That the QE55Q7F's screen is flat rather than curved also has benefits here. What subtle reflections there are aren't distorted across the panel. The outcome is that Samsung has engineered a halfway-affordable TV that can deliver supremely enjoyable (and impactful) images in bright conditions.

The TV excels with its colour handling. The red of Spidey's suit looks saturated and punchy, yet there's also plenty of tonal subtlety in the way sections of the suit catch the light as Spidey swings and leaps around Manhattan. He always looks like a natural, three-dimensional being rather than a vivid but vague red blob.

More naturalistic footage inside Peter Parker's favourite sandwich shop additionally showcases the huge range and accuracy of the QE55Q7F's palette. Skin tones look constantly spot-on, and the variations of tones in all the walls and clothing unlocks the sense of detail and depth in this intimate setting.

The inherent clarity and detailing of Samsung's native 4K panel remains intact during *Spider-Man: Homecoming*'s action sequences, even without using available motion processing. If you use feel the urge to use it, perhaps with sports broadcasts, stick to a custom setting with the judder and blur components set to around 4, as this can reduce judder without instigating many unwanted side effects.

If you're a gamer with a 4K HDR console, the QE55Q7F's knack with detail, colour and motion gets the maximum value from your hardware's capabilities, while a sub-25ms input lag measurement when using the TV's Game mode ensures you can't realistically blame your TV for an embarrassing cliff-edge tumble while playing *Dirt Rally*.

So, there's much to love about the QE55Q7F's pictures, and audio, too, is respectable. The sinking ferry sequence in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* reveals a fairly severe shortage of deep bass, but the midrange is clean, detailed and reasonably open, trebles are handled without harshness or over-emphasis, and voices are consistently clear and prominent. It's fine for everyday use, although –

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes, 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes, HDR10; HDR10+; HLG **TUNER:** Yes, Freeview HD; satellite HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB inputs; optical digital audio output; Ethernet **SOUND (CLAIMED):** N/A **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 1,500 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,225.2(w) x 703.6(h) x 44.9(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 18kg

FEATURES: Integrated Wi-Fi; Bluetooth (device pairing and headphone support); USB and DLNA multimedia playback; USB recording; Eden 2.0 smart engine with 4K HDR apps (Amazon, Netflix, YouTube); metal-clad Quantum Dots; external connections box; low-lag Game mode

PARTNER WITH



SAMSUNG HW-M5750: There's an optional subwoofer for this soundbar, but it sounds bass-rich and wonderfully involving without it – and worthy of the £700 price. Expandable to 5.1 via extra wireless rears, it will also hook up wirelessly to the Q7F.

as always – my advice for movie thrills is to partner it with a soundbar/soundbase at the very least.

Dark destroyer

Imagery does have a couple of weak points. The most obvious drawback of Samsung's light-first approach and edge-lit LED illumination is the presence of noticeable light bars when a bright object is framed against a dark backdrop. Iron Man's twinkling eyes in the lake rescue

scene are joined by blocks of light running up the image. Yet this is mainly an issue when viewing in a dark room. Retain a little ambient light – which you can do thanks to the screen's filter and QLED properties – and these black level blemishes are largely hidden.

What can't be hidden, however, is the set's contrast and black level uniformity dropping off if you watch from an angle of more than around 30 degrees. This is common amongst VA-type LCD screens, of course.

So the QE55Q7F's allure will depend on your viewing environment. If you're a home cinema fan looking for a screen to watch in a blacked-out room, you'll be better served by one of LG or Philips' well-priced OLED TVs, or, if you want something cheaper, Sony's 55XE9005 (which is far less bright, but has more even deep black levels). But for a fantastically sharp, dynamic picture that holds up to bright-room conditions better than anything else on the market, this has to be seen ■



1. The TV supports HDR10, HLG and HDR10+ formats

2. Via its QD panel and edge LED engine, peak brightness exceeds 1,000 nits

HCC VERDICT



Samsung QE55Q7F

→ £1,300 → www.samsung.co.uk

WE SAY: When it comes to a TV to go into a room that's typically fairly bright, Samsung's QE55Q7F is pretty much in a class of its own.

4K BD big brother

Sony's UHD Blu-ray flagship may be gorgeous, but it's a tad less irresistible than its cheaper stablemate, says **Steve May**

The UBP-X1000ES adds a front-panel display



FEW WOULD ARGUE that Sony's UBP-X800 is one of the best performing (affordable) UHD Blu-ray players currently available. So the brand's step-up UBP-X1000ES model clearly has a lot to live up to. The most obvious difference between the two siblings can be found in this model's audio performance, but there's more going on here than just beefed-up sonics.

Visually, the UBP-X1000ES hits the right notes. Clearly a member of Sony's X-squad, it shares the same minimalistic design as its stablemate, albeit adorned with an ES badge and a clear LED display.

The rear panel offers further confirmation that it's a rather different beast; in addition to the dual HDMI outputs (one v2.0 for full AV, the other an audio-only v1.4 output), we also get an analogue stereo output, thoughtfully spaced to accommodate over-engineered interconnects. There are also coaxial and optical digital outputs, an RS232 jack for system control, IR remote port and Ethernet

to complement the onboard dual-band Wi-Fi.

Inside the chassis, the player introduces a high-end 32-bit DAC, and there's a more substantial power supply to call upon.

Less obviously, the X1000ES supports all the major smart home protocols, including

Control4, Crestron and Savant. This will only be of interest if you have a custom-installed AV smart home system that you want to integrate the deck into. It's not relevant if you simply want to plumb the player into a regular AV stack.

No Dolby Vision, yet...

Video performance is first-rate, but in reality no different to what we've already seen on the UBP-X800. The player faithfully delivers to the screen everything on disc, be it with native 2160p content, or artfully upscaled HD. Colour gradations are smooth and band-free.

The only contentious aspect of the X1000ES's video performance concerns HDR. There's support for the HDR10 format found on 4K Blu-rays, but at this point you'd be right to expect Dolby Vision compatibility too – especially as other branches of Sony's business (displays, software) have embraced it. So can the X1000ES support DV? I get the feeling from talking to Sony that the silicon inside should be able to run Dolby Vision, but Sony remains evasive on the subject. Will it come via a firmware update? Your guess is as good as mine.

Ultimately, the biggest point of difference between this and Sony's cheaper deck is audio. There's little doubt that Sony has taken an ES approach here. The onboard DAC handles even the most complex of tracks with ease; intangibles like air and musicality are easy to appreciate. *Back In Black* (AC/DC) has hard rockin' heft; you can feel the physicality of Angus Young's guitar licks, the percussive slap of Phil Rudd's sticks.

SPECIFICATIONS

ULTRA HD: Yes **HDR:** HDR10 **UPSCALING:** Yes. 4K **MULTIREGION:** No. Region B BD; R2 DVD **HDMI:** 1 x v2.0; 1 x v1.4 **MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE OUTPUT:** No **DIGITAL AUDIO:** 1 x digital optical audio out; 1 x digital coaxial audio out **ETHERNET:** Yes **BUILT IN WI-FI:** Yes **SACD/DVD-A:** Yes/Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 430(w) x 54(h) x 265(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 3.9kg

FEATURES: Bluetooth with LDAC; USB; iOS and Android app control; HDR-to-SDR converter; integrated streaming services; DLNA media playback; DSD compatible; DSEE HX audio upscaler

CD playback is clinically precise without being soulless. Psychedelic classic *See Emily Play* (Pink Floyd, *Creation: The Early Years 1967-1972*) can be a little edgy thanks to its vintage, but the X1000ES imparts warmth and adds weight to the recording.

And like its stablemate, the player is universal, happy with both Super Audio CDs and DVD-Audio discs. Such platters can still elicit a smile – the London Philharmonic Orchestra playing *Morning Mood* (Peer Gynt Suite No. 1 Op. 46), in a 5.1 mix from the album *Grieg Classical Masters Series*, is a joyful listening experience.

Stepping up a level

If you want top-class AV, the UBP-X1000ES doesn't disappoint, and as a fully rounded UHD disc spinner, Sony's deck has lots going for it. Value though is less clear cut. The base-line UBP-X800 model is so good – and much cheaper at £350 – that many will find it difficult to justify the price premium. There's also stiff competition from both the Oppo UDP-203 (which ups the audio game with MQA support and caters to Dolby Vision discs) and Panasonic's now bargain-priced DMP-UB900. That said, there's no doubting this player's finesse ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Audiophile, custom install-friendly UHD disc player

POSITION: Sony's top of the line ES-grade model

PEERS: Oppo UDP-203; Panasonic DMP-UB900

HCC VERDICT



Sony UBP-X1000ES

→ £725 → www.sony.co.uk

WE SAY: This universal deck delivers on its high-end promise, but has to contend with its own Sony rival and better-specced competitors.

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WHAT HI-FI?



Stick gets a twist

Roku's debut 4K and HDR streamer satisfies **John Archer's** lust for independence and easy operation

Use the supplied remote or Roku's control app



HANDILY FOR ROKU, in the very week I did this review, YouTube was removed from Amazon video streaming devices because of a spat between Google and Amazon. This serves as a perfect reminder of just why Roku is perhaps the smart choice when it comes to the streaming devices.

Roku somehow seems to exist above and beyond all the petty corporate squabbling so rife elsewhere in the video streaming world. So aside from inevitably not being allowed to carry the iTunes film and TV library, Roku streamers have access to pretty much everything else, including Google Play, Amazon Video, Netflix, Now TV, YouTube and the catch-up services for all of the UK's main terrestrial broadcast channels. In fact, there are hundreds of apps – far more than you'll ever need. There are even direct buttons on the small but well configured remote that get you to Netflix, Red Bull TV, Rakuten TV and YuppTV. (Shame the latter three aren't for Amazon, YouTube and Google Play, but I guess you can't have everything).

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Streaming stick with 4K and HDR support

POSITION: Roku's top-tier streaming product for the UK

PEERS: Apple TV 4K; Chromecast Ultra; Amazon Fire TV

As well as delivering this library of apps, Roku displays a brilliantly neutral approach to presenting them. Nothing is promoted over anything else, and nothing is given undue prominence in the interface – unless you want it to be.

The sort of platform neutrality

offered by the Roku Streaming Stick+ is refreshing in these increasingly fractured – and fractious – times.

Being independent isn't the Streaming Stick+'s only claim to fame, though. It's also Roku's first UK streamer to support 4K resolutions and high dynamic range. 4K HDR support only seems to apply to Netflix and YouTube right now – at the time of writing Amazon Video is available in 4K only, as are Spectiv and CuriosityStream's 'sight seeing' and nature films. Google Play doesn't yet carry any 4K or HDR titles.

Setting the box up is extremely easy, and mercifully it doesn't do any of the 'forced HDR' nonsense that plagued the Apple TV 4K when it launched. The Roku correctly switches between HDR and SDR outputs as determined by what you're watching.

Wi-Fi master

The Streaming Stick+'s elongated design sticks out a bit awkwardly when placed in either rear or side-mounted HDMI inputs, but its design is remarkably small considering how much power it packs. It draws its juice from almost any TV USB port, saving most people the bother of attaching it to the mains. The USB connection cable is fitted with a powerful Wi-Fi receiver too, which gets a good bar or two more Wi-Fi strength from distant routers than any rival device I've used.

The interface looks slightly dated with its plain purple background and boxy structure. However, unlike the cluttered mess of the latest Amazon interface, Roku's is clean and easy to follow. Even better, it's simple to customise, and doesn't go

SPECIFICATIONS

CONNECTIONS: USB power input; HDMI output **KEY APPS:** Netflix; Amazon; YouTube; Now TV; BBC iPlayer; ITV Hub; All 4; My 5; Rakuten TV; YuppTV; Red Bull TV **AUDIO FORMAT SUPPORT:** Dolby 5.1; Dolby Atmos (DD+ format) **VIDEO FORMAT SUPPORT:** To 2,160p at 60fps; HDR10 **DIMENSIONS:** 11.9(h) x 20.3(w) x 93(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 25.5g

FEATURES: Customisable home screen; physical remote; Roku app (Android/iOS); built-in Wi-Fi reception booster; plug adaptor included; free Roku account required

overboard with ramming 'recommended' content down your throat.

The Streaming Stick+ delivers a strong streaming performance. It ramps up to the best-quality streams your broadband can support exceptionally quickly, and its 4K HDR10 visuals look as sharp, rich and punchy as they do from any other streamer.

Images seem exceptionally stable – a result, perhaps, of that Wi-Fi signal-boosting antenna integrated into the power cable. Roku's decision to output every stream in its native source format also means you always get the correct picture format.

The Stick+'s only real performance limitation – aside from not yet delivering 4K and HDR from as many sources as it might – is its lack of support for the Dolby Vision or HDR10+ dynamic metadata formats. The Apple TV 4K and Google Chromecast Ultra both support Dolby Vision.

To me, though, this hardly seems like a deal breaker on a streaming device, especially when the asking price here is £70 and it gets so much else right. Not as on-trend as Amazon's Alexa-equipped Fire TV, but no less impressive. And watching YouTube on it isn't a faff... ■



HCC VERDICT



Roku Streaming Stick+

→ £70 → www.roku.co.uk

WE SAY: No petty squabbles, no annoying content pushing – just heaps of content available through a straightforward interface.

Fuss-free 4K

Homegrown TV corp Cello hopes to make a splash with this competitive 4K debut, even if it gives HDR a cold shoulder.

Steve May reports

THEY'RE BACK!

Alien invasion sequel *Beyond Skyline* lands on Blu, p101



BRITISH TV BRAND Cello has moved into the roiling 4K waters with a dramatic-looking 55-incher. Better known for its budget smallscreens, its Platinum line represents a considerable step up the performance ladder for the company.

First impressions are good. At 88mm deep, this may not be the thinnest TV around but it's reassuringly solid. The silver-grey styling also makes a change from regulation black, and the slimline bezel is nicely finished. There's no central stand, just two widely-spaced feet, so you'll need appropriate furniture to accommodate it. The set's obvious distinguishing feature, the forward-facing driver array, lends an air of additional

AV intent.

All three of the sets HDMI inputs support 4K content, and are joined by a trio of 2.0 USBs, legacy AV inputs for older kit, an optical digital audio output and, unusually, a microSD card reader. The tuner is Freeview HD.

Although ostensibly smart, this connected set actually runs an early version of the Android TV OS. I found it a drag to set up, and ultimately not at all satisfying. Far better to invest in an Amazon, Roku or Now TV box and be done with it.

The user interface is similarly simplistic. There are basic picture presets, namely Standard, Dynamic, Cinema and Personal, but no deep adjustment of image parameters is on offer. There are no interpolation modes to retain motion detail, either.

Bizarrely, the Cinema mode zooms into the picture, presumably to minimise letterbox black bars, trimming picture detail left and right. Needless to say this will be anathema to any self-respecting film fan.

Thankfully, the 4K panel doesn't falter when it comes to delivering 2160p detail. Native 4K content is presented without compromise or unwanted artefacts. *The Crown* (Netflix 4K) exhibits royal levels of detail and texture.

This LED-lit set doesn't stretch to a deep black, which can lead to some hollows and lack of depth. In Luke's bartender suit (*Luke Cage*, Netflix 4K), shadowed areas are empty. But the Cello has no problem with detail in the

SPECIFICATIONS

3D: No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** No
TUNER: Yes. Freeview HD **CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI; 3 x USB; digital optical audio output; Ethernet; composite AV; CI slot **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 16W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 200 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 4,500:1 **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 797(w) x 1,250(h) x 88(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 16.25kg

FEATURES: LED illumination; built-in Wi-Fi; microSD card reader; Android 4.4 TV OS; Cinema, Standard, Dynamic and Personal image presets; audio presets

The TV's soundbar features six drivers

wider image. Colour vibrancy is reasonable, although this isn't a wide colour gamut panel.

Unfortunately, the TV overscans 5 per cent by default (for no good reason), so you might want to disable that sooner rather than later.

As it transpires, this big Cello has considerable gaming potential. Due to the paucity of image processing, input lag is reassuringly low at just 30.3ms in HDMI video mode. This drops to 26.5ms in HDMI PC mode, which is good fraggin' news.

Not so good news is a lack of HDR compatibility – your 4K BDs will play out in SDR here. Then again, it's not particularly bright either. I measured a full white field at 175 nits, with a 10 per cent white window mustering just 184 nits. Consequently, this is a screen best viewed in low light.

An absence of HDR doesn't mean that 4K images can't still have eye-catching impact, but it's a feature shortfall that potential buyers should weigh up.

Where this Platinum shines, unsurprisingly, is audio. In truth there's nothing particularly hi-fi about the 16W sound system here, but the six-driver array sounds a good deal more fulsome and involving than rival budget screens with puny downward-firing stereo speakers.

Bigscreen for your budget

There are few sectors hotter than the budget 4K TV market right now, with Philips and Hisense particularly dominant. This 55-incher keeps Cello in the running. You'll not want to use the ageing Android smart platform, and the lack of HDR compatibility is a demerit, but for an affordable bigscreen for movies and gaming, it warrants a closer look ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 4K SDR flatscreen

POSITION: Between 50in and 65in Platinum stablemates

PEERS: Hisense H55N6800; Philips 55PUS6272

HCC VERDICT



Cello 55 Platinum P55ANSMT-4K
 → £680 → www.celloelectronics.com

WE SAY: There's no HDR support but decent sound and low input lag make this 2160p cheapie a contender for a budget 4K mancave.



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Gold standard

With its futuristic design, Devialet's signature wireless sound system looks like no other. **Steve May** discovers if it has the sonic prowess to match its style



TRACE BACK THE family tree of the Sky Soundbox and you'll soon arrive at the Devialet Phantom. This premium all-in-one effectively paved the wave for Sky's soundbar (see *HCC* #280), and it's just as distinctive in its own idiosyncratic way.

The Phantom family has been around for a while. The Silver launched in 2015, with this gold iteration landing late 2016. Since then it's had a number of firmware updates to improve audio performance. As good a reason as any to call it in for an audition, we reckon.

The speaker is nothing if not distinctive. Curved in gloss white with golden side cheeks, it's a genre-challenging design that tips the scales at a hefty 11.4kg. The quality of

the finish is stunning.

Setup is via Wi-Fi using either Devialet's Android or iOS Spark apps. I tried first with Android, which proved to be a frustrating experience requiring several resets. The iOS app worked painlessly. Go figure.

Unsurprisingly, this is the most powerful

of all the Devialet Phantoms. It's rated at an improbable 4,500W, and claims to muster 108dB. Quite how such a small device packs so much wallop is unclear. Clearly Devialet has discovered how to defy the laws of physics; this is the only way to explain a bass extension that's rated to 14Hz. Those glitzy 22-carat cheeks visibly exhale as it reaches down; a titanium dome tweeter handles the highs.

While the Gold Phantom is primarily a wireless speaker, offering both Bluetooth and Wi-Fi, it still supports hardwired connectivity. There's also an optical digital audio input for an external source, be it music player or TV.

Double it up

The Phantom isn't just a solo act. Two can be paired for high-end stereo, with the help of a Dialog Hub box. The kit price for such a system is (gulp) £4,580, although that does also include a pair of Devialet's Treepod stands, normally sold at £260 each.

Thankfully, my single Phantom had no problem filling a room, and the audio character of this speaker is unlike anything else I've come across. The soundstage is pointed but never monophonic, the mid-range spreading out like a sonic puddle.

With *Quantum Gate* by Tangerine Dream, it's easy to appreciate the speaker's plunging

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 1 x titanium tweeter; 1 x aluminium midbass driver; 2 x bass drivers **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 4,500W **CONNECTIONS:** Ethernet; digital optical audio input **INTEGRATED SERVICES:** None **DIMENSIONS:** 253(w) x 255(d) x 343(h)mm **WEIGHT:** 11.4kg

FEATURES: Integrated Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; ARM Cortex-A9 800MHz dual-core processor; Devialet 24-bit DAC; Spark iOS and Android app; 22-carat rose gold-plated chassis; claimed frequency response of 14Hz to 27kHz (+/- 2dB)

Two Gold Phantoms can run in stereo mode

bass and laser-like high frequencies. The sound is tight and dramatic. There's copious volume, but it never sounds stressed or overwrought. It may not be stereophonic in the traditional sense, but it did seem that the room was actually throbbing.

This sonic pattern rather limits its value as a TV sound system. Very few will have the right room configuration to make this work (the Phantom would need to be central to a large screen), but I can see that it could be quite a statement if you pulled it off.

Certainly the speaker sounds superbly clear and nuanced with speech and TV dialogue. It's dynamic too.

Perhaps because of the sci-fi aesthetic I felt drawn to playing electro rock. It seemed a natural marriage. The insistent riffing of *Assault on Precinct 13*'s main theme was a thing of beauty here, its synth notes writ large. Fabio Frizzi's *Mystery's Apotheosis*, with its relentless Italian splatter beat, also suits the Phantom to a tee; similarly John Carpenter's theme from *In The Mouth of Madness* allows the Phantom to rock out, side cheeks pulsating furiously.

Admittedly the bass can get a little unruly – the Stooges *Search and Destroy* has it struggling to keep up – but fed TV action, it'll have your mates searching in vain for the hidden subwoofer.

The Gold Phantom is about as outrageous a wireless speaker as it's possible to imagine, but it's undeniably impressive. It's not a replacement for a traditional two-channel system *per se*, more a lifestyle statement. It delivers a premium sound – but comes with a premium price attached ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: High-end wireless all-in-one sound system

POSITION: Top of the range Phantom model

PEERS: Bluesound Pulse 2; Master & Dynamic MA770

HCC VERDICT



Devialet Gold Phantom

→ £2,200 → www.devialet.com

WE SAY: The Gold Phantom reinvents wireless all-in-one audio. A high-science sound system for those with a champagne lifestyle.

Bowers & Wilkins PX

These wireless headphones improve on what came before, reports a happy **Benny Har-Even**

WHILE LAST YEAR'S Bowers & Wilkins P7 Wireless headphones were lauded for their sound quality, their lack of noise-cancelling tech meant they lagged behind rivals. This has been corrected with their replacements, the simply-named PX. Out of the box I immediately missed the luxurious plush feel of their predecessor but the extra functionality here more than makes up for it. The cups are grippier, though, which might prove bothersome after extended listening.

The noise-cancelling feature works well. It requires an app on your connected device and offers three levels of filtering – Office, City and Flight – and each can be set to



A more ostentatious gold finish is an option

let through varying degrees of ambient noise.

For a purer, more undiluted sound you can turn the feature off entirely. Do this and you'll be rewarded with a classy audio performance. The somewhat bass-heavy approach of the P7 Wireless has been tamed, delivering a neutral, balanced sound. In Taika Waititi's quirky *Hunt for the Wilderpeople*, the ambience of the New Zealand bush is wonderfully conveyed, along with the film's rhythmic soundtrack, while the more bombastic style

of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* was suitably thrilling. It's musically on-point too: Massive Attack's *Teardrop* reveals the excellent timing of the 40mm drivers, which have filtered down from B&W's flagship P9s.

What makes these B&W cans a winner, however, is their practicality – a motion sensor automatically pauses what you're listening to when you remove them (and automatically restarts your content), so you can zone out of Netflix to answer the door and then get back to it without missing anything. The claimed 22-hour battery life also stood up well during testing.

This is another class act from Bowers & Wilkins – and one that will give wireless naysayers a bit of a headache ■

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Bowers and Wilkins PX

→£330 → www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk

WWW.LETTERBOXD.COM/£FREE

Letterboxd

Mark Craven keeps track of his film habits with this movie review/social media site

'WHAT WAS YOUR favourite film of the year?' is a question that can sometimes stump you, because you can't remember what you watched, and when, and exactly how much you liked it. Social network Letterboxd (although it's not as big, ambitious or overtly 'social' as the likes of Twitter or Facebook) can help. And it's free.



At its most basic, it helps you keep track of your movie-watching. Set up an account, and you can log films after you've viewed them, assigning a score (out of 10), and perhaps writing your own review for other Letterboxd members to enjoy. As you go along, you can view the Diary tab from your homepage, and you'll know exactly when you watched *Kong: Skull Island* (for instance), and how you scored it. Changed your opinion? You can alter the score whenever you like.

Of course, Letterboxd works best when you go retro and assign scores to all the films you've ever seen. This can take a while, and there will be films you've watched that you've completely forgotten about, but actor/director metadata links help you build up your catalogue. You

can then view your list through various filters (movies you've scored as 1 out of 10, titles most popular amongst the wider Letterboxd community, films from the 1950s, etc).

You can also create lists, including a Watchlist of films you're keen to view, and whatever other criteria you decide. Lists can run to over 3,000 titles, so you could perhaps set one up as a virtual index of your disc library. Lists can be made public or private.

Letterboxd succeeds because of its visual flair (films are represented via colourful poster art), flexibility, friendly attitude (it's a community of film geeks, not angry desktop warriors) and ease of use (there are app versions, too). Definitely worth taking a look if you can handle another online identity ■

HCC VERDICT ★★★★★

Letterboxd

→£Free → www.letterboxd.com

The UI is colour-rich and easy to navigate

**LONG-TERM TEST**

Panasonic DMP-UB900

TIME ON TEST: 18 months **REVIEWER:** John Archer

IT'S HARD TO believe that the 4K Blu-ray format is already 18 months old. It feels like only yesterday I was sitting down to play my first 4K disc in my first 4K player. But there's maybe a good reason why time seems to have flown: the first 4K Blu-ray player I ever tested still gets used almost daily as part of my reference home cinema system.

That player is Panasonic's DMP-UB900. Until very recently, it was Panasonic's top-line 4K spinner (a new model – the DP-UB820 – has been revealed at the 2018 CES), and it's astonishing how well it's stood the test of time. So much so that its current £370 price still looks like a bit of a steal.

What's good about it?

The UB900 was designed from the ground up to focus on delivering a premium AV experience. Panasonic's engineers wanted to showcase right away just how

spectacular the Ultra HD Blu-ray format could look, bravely choosing to focus on attention to detail, build quality and high-end features rather than price with the brand's debut player.

It's a testament to how well Panasonic succeeded in its aim that the UB900 still stands up – in performance terms, anyway... – against any rival deck so long after it launched.

It's better designed than most players, for a start. The smoked semi-transparent finish is unique and attractive, while a drop-down flap hides the disc tray and front USB/SD card ports to create a minimalist feel.

On the back plate are stereo and 7.1-channel analogue outputs, fed by 32-bit/192kHz DACs. The UB900 can turn off the circuitry of its analogue audio ports (plus optical and coaxial ones) if they're not being used, and deactivate all video circuits when you're only listening to music.

The UB900 plays DVDs, normal HD Blu-rays and 3D Blu-rays as well as 4K film discs. What's more, it plays all those disc formats supremely well.

With sub-4K discs it's a peerless upscaler, converting content to 2160p with precision, plenty of extra detail

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
Ultra HD Blu-ray
player

POSITION:
Panasonic's flagship
for 2016/17

PEERS:
Oppo UDP-203;
Sony UBP-X1000ES



2



and, best of all, minimal noise. With native 4K Blu-rays, despite being one of the very first 4K Blu-ray players, it delivers a spectacular sense of the extra colour, brightness and detail talents that the format was created to provide. The more recently launched Oppo UDP-203 marginally outguns it in some areas with native 4K playback, but the differences are small, and the Panasonic actually does better than the Oppo at bringing out subtle detail in dark areas.

Then there's a firmware-added feature that lets you adapt the player's output to the light conditions in your room – something that shows a refreshing understanding of the real-world issues that can affect HDR playback.

Finally, the UB900 is one of the best-sounding 4K Blu-ray players to date, and makes for a fine music-only

'It's a testament to how well-crafted Panasonic's 4K debut was that it still delivers the goods 18 months later'

component. There's fun to be had experimenting with its Digital Tube Sound post-processing modes and 32-bit upsampling Remaster tools; hi-res file support extends to DSD; and all sources – but especially music – generally enjoy a detailed, warm, cohesive and balanced tone that's an improvement over the budget competition.

What's not so good about it?

Oppo's 4K Blu-ray players, including the £650 UDP-203 launched in January 2017, deliver slightly richer colours and slightly more detail with native 4K discs. But, as noted, the differences are relatively small, and the bottom line is that both the UB900 and UDP-203 have enough individual picture strengths to ensure that I use them both while testing both TVs and 4K Blu-ray discs.

Another issue is that while my UB900 has enjoyed a host of usually well worthwhile firmware updates over the past 18 months, it has gradually become more prone to crashing.

SPECIFICATIONS

ULTRA HD: Yes **HDR:** HDR10 **UPSCALING:** Yes. To 2,160p **MULTIREGION:** No. Region B BD/R2 DVD (UHD's region-free) **HDMI:** 2 x outputs (1 x A/V; 1 x audio-only) **MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE OUTPUT:** 7.1 **DIGITAL AUDIO OUTPUT:** 1 x coaxial; 1 x optical **ETHERNET:** Yes **BUILT IN WI-FI:** Yes **SACD/DVD-A:** No/No **DIMENSIONS:** 435(w) x 68(h) x 207(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 2.4kg

FEATURES: Dynamic Range Conversion adjustment; USB port; SD card slot; Panasonic smart portal with Netflix, Amazon, YouTube *et al*; DLNA media playback with support for MKV, MP4, MOV, MPEG-2, DSD, AAC, ALAC, FLAC, MP3, WAV and WMV; THX 4K Source certification; 3D BD playback; Pure Audio HDMI mode

It also occasionally runs rather noisily – usually just before one of those crashes. The UI is a little clunky, too.

The single biggest concern with the UB900 in today's 4K BD world, though, is its relatively limited format compatibility – there's no support for DVD-Audio discs, SACDs, and, most importantly, the Dolby Vision HDR platform.

I appreciate that DVD-Audio and SACD are niche formats, but they're often enjoyed by just the sort of AV fan the UB900 (with its built-in multichannel decoder, no less) seems designed to appeal too.

As for Dolby Vision, to be fair it won't have been a high priority when the UB900 launched – the first Dolby Vision 4K Blu-ray disc didn't appear until June 2017. Yet with more Dolby Vision releases arriving all the time, and most of them offering a clear performance boost over industry standard HDR10, the UB900's ignorance of this dynamic format has gone from 'missing tick box' to genuine frustration. In fact, it's arguably the main reason that it now needs to share reference-testing duties with an Oppo UDP-203. And I can use that latter deck to spin SACDs and DVD-Audio discs, too...

Should I buy it?

If you're a serious AV fan seeking a machine to handle music as well as movies, the Panasonic DMP-UB900 is still a temptation – especially at its new £370 price. Its performance is excellent, and it's still being shown plenty of love by Panasonic with firmware and feature updates.

The pity for the UB900 is that it supports neither Dolby Vision nor the new HDR10+ dynamic metadata HDR formats. As the last year has shown, 4K Blu-ray is something of a moveable feast, and some home cinema shoppers will want to retain a top seat at the table. This will likely soon see Panasonic's player forced into retirement. That doesn't make it any less worthy of space in your kit rack, though ■

1. The DMP-UB900 launched at around £600, but its price has dropped

2. The player's front-panel flips down to expose the disc tray

3. Legacy AVRs/processors are catered for by analogue audio outputs

HCC VERDICT



Panasonic DMP-UB900

→ £370 → www.panasonic.co.uk

WE SAY: Although its lack of Dolby Vision (and HDR10+) support is really starting to hurt, this is an incredibly good picture and sound performer for what's now pretty good value.

3



I predict a rIoT...

Martin Pipe celebrates the Internet of Things, before smartening up his home with a well-priced starter pack

AROUND TWENTY YEARS ago I encountered something called 'ScreenFridge' – a collaboration between white goods manufacturer Electrolux and telecoms giant Ericsson. ScreenFridge, probably the first domestic appliance to be network-enabled, was trialled with fifty Danish families and six prototype Stockholm 'homes of the future'. It looked just like a large refrigerator, but its door was dominated by an LCD panel...

That panel incorporated a touchscreen, offering a 'food management' section dealing with how to store, handle and prep food. There was also a digital cookbook, plus radio, TV, an on-board camera enabling you to leave messages for other family members, and access to weather reports and traffic info from ScreenFridge's always-on internet connection.

Thanks to its kitchen location, ScreenFridge's touchscreen became the hub of those futuristic Stockholm showhomes. It could interface with early network-enabled home automation systems, including security, air-conditioning and lighting, and there was excited talk of telling your smart home how to behave via voice recognition.

The ScreenFridge never went beyond the concept phase, and smart fridges made more of an impact in noughties movies (including 2004's *Stepford Wives* remake), but in the smartphone-driven present,

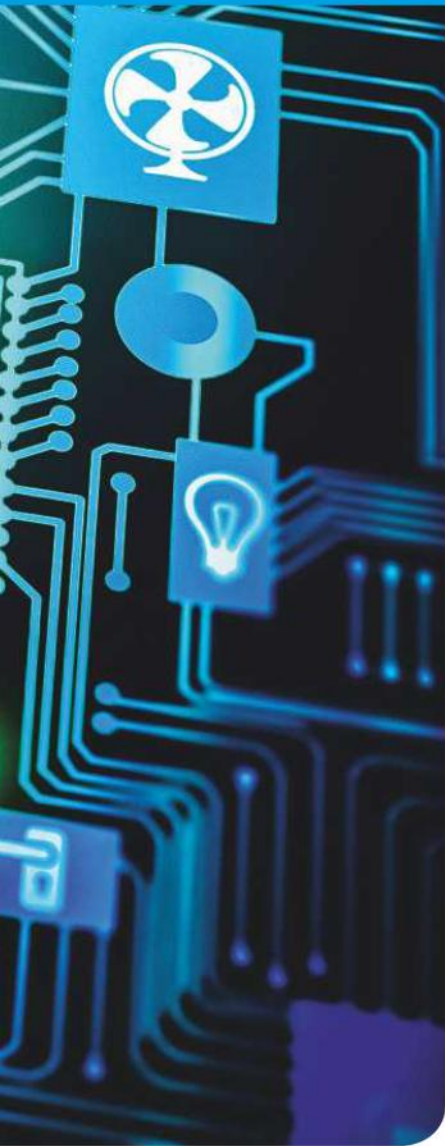
fiction has become fact. Fancy a network-savvy fridge? Your local retailer will have one.

Simpler, slicker, smarter

Welcome, then, to the world of IoT – or Internet of Things – where the planet's biggest consumer electronics brands are clamouring for your cash with a range of smart connected gear. The idea being that IoT can make your everyday life simpler, slicker and smarter by having all your house hardware communicating without you having to worry about it. Samsung is forging ahead with its SmartThings range; Amazon Echo and Google Home smart speakers, driven by assistants, are selling like hot cakes. Add in driverless cars, smart watches, mosquito killing robots, Levi/Google's 'connected jacket', smart toilets and greetings droids and you can see the way the electronics world is heading.

Some seem to be solutions looking for problems – Juicero, a maker of an internet-enabled fruit-press (its food packages were proprietary, and the machine wouldn't operate without a 'net connection) recently shut up operations.

Still, there can be no doubt that a potentially life-changing revolution is underway, with products like domestic energy smart meters helping to get the public switched onto the IoT. And even if you're the kind of person who is driven to distraction by



firmware updates killing functionality on your smart telly, you might want to investigate a little extra tech in your AV setup, not least because devices now aren't particularly expensive. The days of home integration being the reserve of the rich are over; more affordable DIY kits are readily available.

Plug... and play

I've had a chance to play around with some of the Home Control products sold by Devolo, a brand better-known for its powerline networking products. Devolo sells a 'starter kit' intended to get you doing useful things. For £180 you get a central control hub built into a mains plug, a door/window sensor and a smart-metering plug. The system is driven via a web interface (myDevolo), or a free Home Control app for Android/iOS devices.

The central unit, as one would expect from Devolo, has powerline networking built in – good news if you're already using this technology around the home. If not, its Ethernet port will connect to your router via the supplied cable. There's no Wi-Fi option.

'Smart-metering plug' is a bit of a misnomer, as this component's ability to monitor the power consumption of a device plugged into its socket is only half the story. It will also apply or remove power, letting you switch hardware on or off via your smartphone, and on a timer function, too. Loads of up to 3kW are supported, meaning that anything from a light to a small heater or big amplifier can be accommodated.

The starter pack's final supplied component is a wireless magnetic door sensor in two parts. One is fixed to the door or window, and the other to the frame. It's ideal for security – or simply monitoring how many people are sneaking into your cinema room when you're not there.

Devolo uses an industry smart home standard known as Z-Wave – other standards, which are mutually incompatible, include Insteon, Zigbee and Thread. Z-Wave is optimised for transmission of low-speed data around the home using a technique known as 'mesh radio'. In the UK, the chosen frequency of 868.42MHz offers a greater coverage area relative to Wi-Fi's 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands. Up to 20m is possible indoors, but if Z-Wave devices are used outside distances of up to 100m can be attained. Z-Wave devices consume less power than Wi-Fi ones, which is just as well as many (among them Devolo's door/window sensor) run off internal batteries to ease installation. Devolo says a two-year life is typical from each set of batteries.

Devolo sells a whole range of Z-Wave accessories to expand this system. Among these are a motion sensor (£50); key-fob switch (£35); 110dB siren offering a choice of four tones and visual alarm (£80); smoke detector (£50); humidity sensor (£50); double wall-switch (£40); flood sensor (£50); digital room thermostat control panel (£80); and an intelligent radiator thermostat (this £60 device replaces a standard 'mechanical' thermostat). Additional smart-metering plugs and door/window contact sensors are available for £40 each. A single central unit (available separately for £110) can manage as many as 232 devices.



Not that they need be made by Devolo. As long as they meet the Z-Wave specification, they should be compatible. Among the other manufacturers producing Z-Wave products are Aeon Labs, Axis, Danfoss, Domitech, Foscam, HomeSeer, Fibaro, Pyronix, Remotec, Secure, TKB, Vera, Vision, Way2Call, Yale, Z-Wave and Zipato. Their products include – alternatives to Devolo's own products apart – security cameras, dimmer switches, smart light bulbs (and lamp holders), door-locks, remote control handsets, and analogue/digital interfaces to connect existing kit. Oh, and Amazon Echo hardware is supported too. So there's plenty of scope to expand a system.

Setup isn't too technically fraught. Each device has a unique ID, and must be registered to the central unit. Devolo makes this easy with the wizard-based myDevolo system that runs on a web browser. After registering, this cloud portal detects your central unit and updates it to the latest software. This allows bugs to be fixed, and new features added (at the time of writing, Home Control was about to be bolstered with 'geofencing' – which adapts system behaviour to the user's proximity – and support for Google Home). You can then add your devices. >



Above right: Devolo's Home Control starter pack enables home automation around the Z-Wave standard

Right: Electrolux's ScreenFridge, possibly the world's first internet-connected domestic appliance



Devolo's plug-based central control hub needs either an Ethernet or powerline connection to your router

MyDevolo has separate lists for Devolo and third-party devices. Philips Hue lamps are listed in the latter, although these aren't compatible with Z-Wave unless an intermediate 'bridge' unit is installed.

Helpful setup videos stream from the website after a specific Devolo product has been chosen for registration.

At your convenience

Physically, most of the Devolo sensors can be attached via self-adhesive pads, or screwed into place. Their self-contained nature equates to flexibility – for example, a switch can be installed where it happens to be most convenient. Once your devices are in place, the fun can begin.

Locations can be specified for zoning purposes, one or more objects (e.g., sensors and switches both real and 'virtual') defined as widgets for use within the system, and devices grouped together for collective treatment. You can create rules determining the behaviour of the system – and this adds up to a lot of customisation. If, for example, a motion-sensor is triggered, then you can arrange for a light, connected to a smart-metering plug, to switch on for a predetermined period. A smoke detector could fire up the siren and send you an alert via e-mail. And if someone opens a window, then the radiator thermostat can be set to automatically turn down.

You can also make the outcome dependent on another condition being fulfilled; for instance, the aforementioned light will only turn on if the sensor is tripped when it's night-time. A scheduling feature, meanwhile, essentially acts as a timer.

I found I enjoyed spending time with the app's dashboard, which lets you monitor statistics (like alarms and power consumption) and remotely turn things on or off.

You could, with a little effort and imagination, use some of these gadgets – notably smart-metering plugs – to automate elements of your home cinema. Opening the door to your movie den

could kickstart an automated lights on, system on procedure, for instance.

What about security and network access concerns? Z-Wave devices, like sensors and switches, are not conversant with Internet Protocols (IP); the central unit mediates between them and a standard IP network. Essentially, this central unit – which stores data and commands – is the brain of the system, and this has advantages. If you have no internet connection, Home Control will work as long as mains power is present and the batteries are not discharged.

Press a wall switch, and lights connected to a smart-metering plug will continue to turn on or off. A motion sensor will still trigger the alarm siren. And there's nothing to prevent a smart radiator thermostat from being activated by a door or window contact. But e-mail alerts won't be sent, and until the network is restored the app will be useless. As for security, the central unit only talks to registered components; furthermore, communication between the central unit and the myDevolo portal is encrypted.

Of course, the company isn't alone in offering entry-level systems. For a similar price, you can buy Samsung's app-controlled SmartThings Starter Kit, which claims to have 'everything you need to create and monitor your own smart home in no time.' Conversant in both ZigBee and Z-Wave protocols, this bundles a central control hub, motion sensor, a power outlet, a 'multi-sensor' (temperature, vibration, open/closed doors and windows) and a 'presence sensor' (a portable device that will inform you via the hub when a child, car or pet has come or gone). Again, a range of add-ons expand the system. Smart Things was only Kickstarted back in 2012. A couple of years later, Samsung acquired the American firm for \$200m. Yes, IoT and 'smart homes' are set to become big business...

Both these starter kits allow you to dip your toes into an exciting new water. Smart homes and the Internet of Things are only going to become more prevalent in the coming years – now's your chance to get ahead of the game. You just need to be prepared to indulge in a bit of DIY and creative thinking... ■



Samsung's SmartThings Starter Kit



Devolo's Home Control app puts reports and settings in the palm of your hand

Philips' Hue smart lighting can be integrated within a Zigbee or Z-Wave system



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**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017**
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Best wireless headphones over £200
Bowers & Wilkins PX

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**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017**
Wireless headphones
Best wireless in-ear headphones
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WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
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(Sony STR-DN1080)



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MusicCast



YAMAHA • RX-A1070 • AV RECEIVER

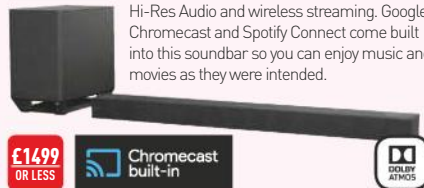
7.2-channel receiver MusicCast, Dolby Atmos and DTS:X support, along with Spotify, Bluetooth, AirPlay.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A870 & RX-A3070

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017
Best soundbar and subwoofer
under £1000
(Sony HT-ST5000)

**SONY • HT-ST5000
SOUNDBAR/SUB**

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WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Best soundbar
(Q Acoustics M2)

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WARRANTY

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AWARDS 2017
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Best soundbar under £1000
(Bluesound Pulse)

£999
OR LESS

MQA

TIDALMASTERS

6YEAR
WARRANTY

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2017
Best soundbar
(Sonos Playbar)



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5.1.2 DOLBY ATMOS SPEAKER PACKAGE

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(Optoma UHD65)



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PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Best 55-inch TV
LG OLED55B7V



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Panasonic

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2017

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Discrete multichannel audio is under attack from virtual surround sound, stereo systems and wireless speakers. **Mark Craven** wonders if this is just a case of survival of the fittest

IS SURROUND SOUND now only the preserve of serious AV fans? It's beginning to look that way. And I'm not sure what can be done about it.

Another CES has been and gone and while there's been plenty of innovation, it hasn't centred around multichannel audio.

Speaker brands and AV amp companies are largely giving the show a steer, preferring to launch within their own timeline, at their own events, or at other shows that are a better fit – Munich's High-End Show, for example. AVR unveils are very much pushed to the sidelines.

But the fact I think the future of home surround sound may be on the line boils down to more than just a poor show at CES. Everyday consumers, basically, just don't seem interested.

Twenty years ago people knew what home cinema was all about, at the budget level. You went into your local retailer, and came away with a big box full of smaller boxes that wired together and made an agreeable noise. But then came wireless technologies, which neaten up our living rooms and made cables seem ugly. And then came soundbars and soundbases, which arrived in smaller boxes, used less wires, and still made an agreeable noise.

The concept of home cinema sound – which most *HCC* readers understand to be discrete multichannel – has been blurred by convenience tech. Single-enclosure soundbars, with low driver counts, now promise 'cinematic audio'.

A glimpse of the future

I have a soft spot for Denon's HEOS AVR. Here's a product that combines most (but by no means all) of the benefits of an AV receiver with wireless surround speakers, requiring only physical cable

runs to the enclosures that are closest by. To me, it looks very much how I imagine the future of domestic, non-specialist home cinema should look – and the design is great too. But the price tag of a full, wireless surround, wireless subwoofer HEOS AVR-powered 5.1 setup is considerable – most likely twice as much as the 4K display the buyer wants to partner it with.

That's another thing the all-in-one systems of yesteryear had going for them – they were cheap.

True, we are seeing some development of soundbars towards multichannel. Philips and JBL sell bars with detachable speakers that can become surround units; Samsung, Sony and LG allow multiroom speakers to do double duties.

But none of this appears to be really taking off in the way that soundbars did, or the way voice-activated smart speakers are now. Much of the CE industry seems to have bumped along at a sedate pace regards multichannel innovation, and now can't catch up with consumers who have moved on to other things.

Sometimes I find it a little odd, as, y'know, **genuine home cinema sounds utterly awesome**. Who wouldn't want it, even with a few wires to disguise? Other times I can see exactly the appeal of stereo sound systems – they're affordable, they're neat, they're idiot-proof and knock a TV's sonics into a cocked hat.

My question then, readers, is have any of you packed away a multichannel setup in favour of something more manageable? Or put off a system upgrade because more speakers equals more domestic drama? Are you in desperate need of wireless rears, or are cables all part of the fun? ■

*Does home cinema sound have to be at least 5.1?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

Mark Craven
is secretly thankful
that family
members no longer
ask him to help
assemble and wire
up their all-in-one
systems





Film Fanatic

Before he gets started on watching this year's biggest blockbusters, **Anton van Beek** looks back across the best that 2017 had to offer...

A NEW YEAR is upon us once again, which of course means that we are smack in the middle of awards season. As I sit and write this issue's column, the Golden Globes are shrinking in the rear view mirror and the BAFTA and Academy Awards are looming ever larger on the horizon. This has got me thinking about what I would put on my own list of the best films of 2017.

Before I get started, it's worth noting that this isn't going to be a run-through of the sort of introspective indie dramas that usually get awards thrust their way at this time of year. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, the Oscars and their ilk already have those films covered. Secondly, they're just not very exciting, are they? Nor will this be a list of my favourite Blu-rays of the past 12 months, because that would just end up being a bunch of restored 1970s *giallo* thrillers and 1980s splatter films, and nobody wants to read that [*you're right* – Ed]. So with that taken care of, let's get going...

Given my fondness for the horror genre, it only feels right to start there. Indeed, 2017 was a good year for fright films, with the remake of Stephen King's *IT* (see p94) proving to be one of the year's biggest box office surprises. Meanwhile, Jordan Peele's powerful and insidious *Get Out* fully deserved the praise that was heaped upon it. However, my own pick here is *Alien: Covenant*. A controversial choice to be sure, but for all of its flaws, **Ridley Scott's second *Alien* prequel continues to mine fascinating philosophical concepts** while, most importantly, returning the franchise to its body horror roots in disgusting fashion.

The superhero genre also revealed itself to be in great shape in 2017 thanks to the likes of *Logan*, *Wonder Woman* and *Thor: Ragnarok*. However, the

standout for me was undoubtedly *The LEGO Batman Movie*, a side-splitting celebration of the Caped Crusader's long and frequently very bizarre comic book history, which plays out through the prism of a twisted love story between Batman and the Joker. Not bad for a kids' film based on a range of toys.

Over in the world of sci-fi blockbusters I was utterly blown away by *Blade Runner 2049* (see p28), a remarkable piece of filmmaking we may never see the like of again following its disappointing box office performance. And, for all of the wailing and moaning online, I also had a terrific time with *The Last Jedi* (pictured). But I want to give a special mention to Luc Besson's *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*, a wildly imaginative and exhilarating space opera that does a spectacular job of capturing the unique look and feel of European comic books.

No more monkeying around

I enjoyed all of those films, but there's one that I've re-watched more than any other. One that I've gone out of my way to show to visiting friends. That film is *Kong: Skull Island*.

Look... I'm as shocked as you are. While the original *King Kong* has a special place in my heart, the various remakes and spin-offs that followed have been guilty pleasures at best (*King Kong Escapes*) or bloated imitations at worst (Peter Jackson's epic). Here, though, the decision to use the giant ape to explore US reactions to the Vietnam War completely won me over. How could anyone possibly resist the sight of an enormous gorilla punching helicopters out of the sky?

Here's hoping that 2018 has just as many cinematic surprises in store... ■

*What were your favourite movies released in 2017?
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

In the aftermath of *Kong: Skull Island*, **Anton van Beek** is convinced that 2020's *Godzilla vs Kong* will be the greatest film in the history of cinema





In The Mix

Jon Thompson believes there are many factors to be addressed before we should all start looking forward to 8K home cinema

THE KING IS dead, long live the King! 8K is here and is now firmly part of the AV landscape.

4K was only ever a stepping stone and 8K was always the end goal in current display technology for broadcasters. Still, before you start banging your head against the wall next to your new 4K TV, let's look at this in context.

Firstly, you really need something approaching a 110in display to justify 8K resolution, whereas many people are buying 55-to-65in 4K screens at present. But there are more flies in the ointment than simple screen size.

I was at an 8K demo in 2006 at the NAB expo. It was impressive, but did show that other things needed to develop. The main issue was the camera lens; it didn't have focus from its centre to the edges. The system had changed by 2012 and the London Olympics. I am no fan of sports, but I was strangely mesmerised by 8K swimming footage, and the opening ceremony looked amazing, even though colour space and dynamic range were the elephants in the 8K room – Olympics 2012 material was filmed in SDR, in the REC.709 colour space. REC.2100, very much an HDR colour space as it defines that colour should not desaturate as brightness increases, is key to ensuring the drama of 8K succeeds on super-size screens. There are challenges for manufacturers to boost brightness without weakening colour response.

A positive of 8K's high pixel density is that it can better handle lower bit depth, due to having so many pixels available to track the graduation from one tone to another. But to really utilise the pixel count of 8K you need an original image of an ever higher resolution. 12K would be ideal.

Why not just pixel map? In audio, Nyquist Law dictates that in order to capture audio accurately,

the sample rate should be at least twice as high as the maximum frequency you need to reproduce. This also applies to images when mastering. An 8K master will produce a better 4K master than a 4K source mastered to 4K. In the real world that may not be practical, due to a number of limitations – one of which is the resolution of the source. In digital motion picture cameras, the popular Arriflex IMAX Alexa shoots at uncompressed 6K.

Movies to match

And what would you watch on an 8K display? One of the complaints around 4K BD is the Hollywood movies that have found their way on to the format via 2K upscales. As I've written before, this is due to the short-sighted view of studio executives that 2K is good enough and no one can tell the difference – when we can. With 8K this situation is going to be even worse. Okay, so any CGI film is easy to render out at 8K, which is Pixar's approach (it doesn't make a master and rework it for different formats, it actually renders out at the required resolution, colour space and aspect ratio). But **for live action, the only true 8K master I know of is Dunkirk** (pictured).

So, the new king may be getting suited up, but still poses some major challenges. The industry's love of 2K will be hard to shake. Workflow and VFX pipelines need to be upgraded.

At least things are developing. The first 8K projector for commercial use, using an 8K DLP chip, has been announced by Digital Projection and will demo at this year's ISE show. If you're in Amsterdam early Feb, maybe sneak in and grab an eyeful. Just don't throw away your 4K TV just yet ■

Are you worried by the arrival of 8K TV? Or excited? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at [@johnnyfocal](https://twitter.com/johnnyfocal)



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Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current tech? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

4K BD is too up-and-down

I was very interested in Mark Craven's column in *HCC* #281 about 4K. Both my friend and I have full 4K systems – he's gone OLED and I went with a Sony VPL-VW320ES 4K projector. Partnered with a Panasonic DMP-UB700, some things are mindblowing. *Planet Earth II*, *Life* and *Passengers* are in my eyes massive upgrades over their Blu-ray versions.

However, both myself and my friend agree that some 4K platters are incredibly bad. *The Expendables* trilogy is a perfect example. I've done the Pepsi challenge and ran the Blu-ray through a separate Blu-ray player against the 4K disc, and the Blu-ray blows the 4K version into the weeds with, wait for it, more definition and a better colour palette. I couldn't believe it. After paying all this money – and some of the poor-quality upscales we're seeing – I'm appalled that we're the only ones complaining.

Blade Runner, although showing nicer colours and a slight upgrade in resolution, has double the amount of film grain, just like *The Fifth Element*.



The Expendables movies in 4K: HCC reader Mark Dodd is not a fan

I know film grain is inherent in films. I love film grain when it was there originally. It gives me that cinema feel. However, when it's been added to a so-called 4K disc due to some of the remastering, it's unacceptable.

I wouldn't currently advise people splashing out on 4K unless they're replacing broken/old tech, and the only reason I'm not too annoyed is the PJ is incredible at upscaling. For example,

Elysium upscaled using this PJ has everyone thinking I have a 4K copy. It's the same with *Skyfall* and other reference 1080p films.

When studios aren't filming in 4K–6.5K and palming us off with bad 2K-to-4K masters that barely add anything into the mix that my PJ could do, is that right? Surely not...

Right now the tech in homes is ahead of the tech that studios are using and the world now

BBC UHD – what's needed?

Every issue of *HCC* I look to see if there's news on what hardware will be necessary for when the BBC make UHD available terrestrially or via iPlayer. When I search the web there's nothing newer than from about 18 months ago. Could you give an update? I want to get a new TV but want it to receive terrestrial broadcasts if they're going to happen.

Dan Simpson, Esher

Mark Craven replies: The BBC introduced 4K on iPlayer just before Christmas (and ending on Jan 16), with *Blue Planet II*. It used HLG HDR (backwards-compatible, meaning non-HDR TVs can still enjoy the increased resolution and colour gamut.) The Beeb recommends a broadband connection of at least 23Mbps.

Terrestrial broadcasts, as opposed to streams, still seem a long way off, but making sure your TV supports HLG will give you some futureproofing, and ensure full iPlayer compatibility (likely to remain the BBC's only 4K platform for a while).



Blue Planet II ushered in the BBC's 4K iPlayer service

demands a lot more quality than it used to. Studios can't just repackage, slap 4K on the platter and hope we all buy because they say we should.

4K can be sensational. *Planet Earth II* and a handful of films show this. But for every good disc there is unfortunately a poor disc as well! *Mark Dodd*

Mark Craven replies: UHD Blu-ray is certainly a format showcasing varying image quality, and causing all manner of arguments. Partly this comes down to the fact that it's not just a boost in resolution, but introduces HDR and wide colour, which greatly affects how different movies will look on different systems. Personal tastes vary, too, as you've outlined with *Blade Runner* and its prominent grain. And then there's the assets used themselves. Some 2K upscales can look poor (the likes of *Westworld* being a recent example where image clarity seems barely improved over the BD iteration).

Then again, as I've said previously, some upscales look great (*Transformers: The Last Knight*), while some discs based upon 4K scans of film elements don't (*GoodFellas*). I've not seen any of *The Expendables* films on UHD.

Improvements will come as movie production moves more widely to above 4K capture, and digital cinema transitions out of 2K, but that's a long journey. At the same time, mastering and HDR implementation should get better too.

Just sit down!

I want to react to the *Digital Copy* opinion piece by Mark Craven in *HCC* #279. 'An intermission might be an idea...' Are you kidding me?

At home we can do what we want, but for the cinema experience we just have to go full out, even when it's a long movie. I don't want to be interrupted from my immersion by any outside factor, especially not an intermission where the house lights go back on and there is music playing from the radio.

Just don't go for the zeppelin-sized drink if you know your bladder can't take such a long screening. But, please, no intermission!

In Belgium it has become mainstream to have an intermission during the screenings in daytime and children's movies. When asked why, they say it's because the audience is asking for it. For me this is a nonsense excuse, because it's really a commercial break so people can again buy a drink and popcorn. (There are more staff in the candy store during the break than during the screening, so don't tell me it's just a toilet break).

And the bad part is the timing of the intermission, especially in the Kinepolis Group cinemas. Sometimes it is mid-sentence, or during an important scene. They just pick a timecode. (When I worked as a projectionist we

★ Star Letter...

Don't forget about 1080p BD!

As a long-time reader of *HCC* (from the very first edition) I've benefitted enormously from your kit reviews and, of course, gone through numerous upgrades over the years. In more recent times I have also found I greatly value your reviews of Blu-rays themselves, with their insight on image and sound quality as well as content. I've avidly followed the move from DVD to BD and indeed 3D BD. But the shift to 4K is leaving me cold.

While the leaps from VHS to DVD and then DVD to Blu-ray were highly significant, I find the 4K shift of far less interest. Most of my favourite films on DVD have been replaced by Blu-ray but the improvement of 4K is not enough to do so again.

My gripe is about your reviews of the software. Latterly you seem to not bother commenting on the quality of a Blu-ray version if you are reviewing the 4K version – as with the review of *War for the Planet of the Apes* – and you seem to have dropped 3D comment completely, letting down readers like myself.

Your review of the Optoma HD25e PJ, where you commented on the quality of its 3D reproduction amongst other things, led me to purchase. Various reviews of Darbee processing led me to subsequently add that as well via a second-generation separate unit. 4K with HDR on a big telly is fine but a projector is true home cinema to me (with at least a 100in screen). All the TI-chipped DLP projectors lack 3D and the Sony projectors, frankly, are too expensive.

My setup, with the Darbee sharpness boost and its almost quasi-HDR luminescence impact, is actually very good. Black level issues are considerably addressed by using a grey screen rather than a white one, given the natural brightness of the Optoma projector. Friends who visit are blown away.

So back to the question of software reviews. Please don't abandon the many

readers happy with their current systems and reconsider how you present software reviews. My local supermarkets still sell 3D Blu-rays

and they fly off the shelves. Not a sighting of a 4K disc. My local HMV has two short shelves for 4K amongst literally hundreds of Blu-rays. As I live in the UK and would have to choose between the relatively 'minor' improvements of 4K compared with the far greater impact of 3D, I would always choose the latter – at least for well-devised stereoscopic presentations to be viewed at 100in.

I believe Blu-ray has achieved mass market; I do not think there is any hope of 4K discs achieving that. When you review the 4K discs add some comment about the standard Blu-ray and also the 3D versions which far more people actually buy. You are in danger of leaving me behind as you primarily focus on the latest 'frontier'. *Alan Russell*

Anton van Beek replies: Regards 3D, we happily review 3D titles when review discs are made available (as was the case with *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets*). Increasingly, 3D platters aren't being distributed for pre-release review.

As for comparing 4K and 1080p encodes in our reviews, how much we can do this depends on the space available. Typically, we aim to cover differences between the versions, but admit that with *...Planet of the Apes* we focused solely on the 4K disc. We'll take your comments onboard!

Star letter-writer Alan grabs intense action-thriller *Brawl in Cell Block 99* on Blu-ray. This acclaimed genre mash-up is out now on Digital Download, DVD and Blu-ray, courtesy of Universal Pictures Home Entertainment.



put the intermission between reels in 35mm so it was already a good moment, and with DCP (Digital Cinema Package) I took time to search for a good moment around the middle of the movie, even without knowing the movie.)

This all started with *Titanic* when it arrived in theatres on 35mm reels, because the complete movie was just too big to go on the horizontal platters (which hold the movie during the playback). So they started to include an intermission because of practical reasons; they were able to reload the 35mm

projector with the second part. But now with the DCP there is no excuse.

As I always say, if a director wanted an intermission he/she would have included an *Entr'acte* (*Ben-Hur*, *The Sound of Music*). If not, the movie is not meant to have one!

For me an intermission in a movie theatre is a lack of respect for the film, the film crew and the audience. It cuts the movie experience! What we do at home is our choice, in the cinema it is forced upon us by the management for commercial purposes. >

At least they don't show adverts during this break, just like a commercial break on television. Damn, I hope they don't get new ideas now...

Patrick, Belgium

Mark Craven replies: Actually, Patrick, maybe you've convinced me. Perhaps I'm guilty of thinking that intermissions would be good for me and not considering everyone else in the multiplex. I still believe, however, that any movie approaching three hours could do with a *bona fide* director-approved intermission, as Quentin Tarantino introduced for his 'roadshow' cut of *The Hateful Eight*.

Full HD to 4K upgrade

I wanted to take the opportunity to wish the folks at HCC a happy, AV-laden New Year!

It was a year ago now that I renewed my subscription to HCC after many years of absence and it didn't take me long to get bitten (once again) by the AV bug! After the very first issue, I was inspired to put pen to paper (or rather fingers to keyboard) and managed to get Star Letter in the very next issue!

As 2017 lumbered on through Brexit, North Korea, Brexit, Donald Trump, Brexit, Hollywood scandals and Brexit, I gradually began upgrading my old Full HD AV setup to 4K, albeit very modestly due to budget constraints.

I replaced my old Panasonic 50in plasma with a Hisense 65in 4K HDR LCD set (65M7000), eschewing the 55in Samsung KS7000 I originally had my eye on for the largest screen I could accommodate on my TV unit, while not straying 'too far' from my financial forecast! Okay, so I've given up those plasma-defining black levels due to the Hisense set coming with 'some caveats' but overall it performs exceedingly well given the price point and has certainly left friends and family feeling impressed.

I swapped my ageing Denon AVR with a more 'up-to-date' HDMI/Atmos-capable



The extended cut of *The Hateful Eight* featured an intermission

Denon receiver – the X2300W. Maybe it has a little less grunt than I was used to with my old 3803 but it's still more than adequate for my room size, providing me with a very open and precise soundstage. Not to mention I picked up the X2300W as a veritable bargain due to the launch of the X2400W happening around that time. I was also able to shed about a hundredweight of coaxial cables and optical leads for an HDMI-only solution for AV sources, tidying things up behind the scenes.

Lastly, my Panasonic DMP-BDT500 Blu-ray spinner was traded in for (another Panasonic) UHD-capable player (the UB700). It weighed in at about a tenth of what the BDT500 did, but although not exactly filling me with confidence when I removed it from the box, sound and picture quality spoke for itself.

I did, however, keep my M&K K Series 7.1 speaker array and REL Q150E sub in place and will do – certainly for the foreseeable future... Atmos is still on my mind!

Even with this humble uplift, I'm blown away by the results! I'm enjoying 4K content from Netflix, Amazon and 4K HDR on UHD Blu-ray, and even though I've had to stay within a budget, it has without a doubt been a significant step-up from my old AV gear.

I currently await an app-controlled LED Ambilight backlighting kit with 4K pass-through to liven up the rear of my 65in beastie, to add the finishing touch but mostly just for the hell of it!

So, all-in-all, this has been a great introduction to the world of UHD and the results thus far have already convinced me that it will be worth investing a tad more the next time I upgrade in around five years' time! A lot can happen on the technology front in that time and suffice to say I will not allow my HCC subscription to lapse again, so I can keep up with everything AV between now and then!

Ian Forster

My discs, my rules

I refer to Mark Craven's *Digital Copy* article in HCC #280. Like you I have Ultra HD BDs and BDs arranged separately on four shelves of quite a large wall unit. I must confess they are not arranged in any particular order. So *Guardians of the Galaxy: Vol 2* sits happily alongside *Europe 4K*.

I have a slightly smaller unit that contains all my TV documentaries. I have a further unit that houses my boxsets, such as the new Harry Potter 4K collection and the inevitable *Star Wars* and *Jurassic Park*.

I have given away discs to family members where I have duplicated them in a different format. For example I had the original Harry Potter boxset but as I bought the 4K edition, I gave my old discs to my nephew.

Thanks for the reminder about making an inventory of items as insurance companies would want to see this if you were ever to make a claim on your household insurance.

John Nelson ■



'Open and precise soundstage': Denon's AVR-X2300W

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Write to HCC, AV Tech Media Ltd, Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF, or email us at letters@homecinemachoice.com
Please note: we cannot guarantee to print/answer all the letters we receive. Sorry.

WIN! Great Blu-rays up for grabs...

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Hammer Horrors

To celebrate the Blu-ray release of *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, *The Horror of Frankenstein*, *To the Devil a Daughter* and *Straight On Till Morning* on January 29, we've teamed up with Studiocanal to offer one reader a superb prize. Not only will they win those Blu-rays, but also *Demons of the Mind*, *Blood from the Mummy's Tomb*, *Fear in the Night* and *Scars of Dracula*, too, as well as a selection of posters and press books!

Question:

In what year did *To the Devil a Daughter* arrive in UK cinemas?

Answer:

A) 1972 B) 1974 C) 1976

Email your answer with 'Hammer Horrors' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



Kingsman: The Golden Circle

The smash-hit action sequel explodes onto DVD, Blu-ray and 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray on January 29, courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment. To mark the release we have five *Kingsman: The Golden Circle* Blu-rays to give away!

Question:

Which actor plays the role of Gary 'Eggsy' Unwin in the *Kingsman* movies?

Answer:

A) Mark Strong B) Taron Egerton
C) Colin Firth

Email your answer with 'Kingsman 2' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



Criterion Collection

February sees two more cult favourites join The Criterion Collection's Blu-ray lineup here in the UK. First, on February 5, comes the 1986 comic thriller *Something Wild*, which is followed on February 19 by the legendary 1968 horror classic *Night of the Living Dead*. To celebrate we have three pairs of these two new Criterion Collection Blu-rays to be won!

Question:

Who directed *Night of the Living Dead*?

Answer:

A) George A. Romero B) Wes Craven
C) Tobe Hooper

Email your answer with 'Criterion Collection' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!



American Assassin

Start the New Year off in explosive style with this tense spy thriller starring Dylan O'Brien and Michael Keaton. *American Assassin* is out now on DVD, Blu-ray and 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray and thanks to Lionsgate Home Entertainment we have five copies of the *American Assassin* 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray up for grabs!

Question:

Michael Keaton played the villain in which 2017 superhero film?

Answer:

A) Justice League B) Power Rangers
C) Spider-Man: Homecoming

Email your answer with 'American Assassin' as the subject heading – and don't forget to include your postal address!

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Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Patrick** has crafted a top-storey projector-based cinema room, and persuaded Amazon's Alexa to control it all for him. Time to take a tour...



Patrick says the 120in screen makes the room feel like a true 'home' cinema

Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame – introduce yourself!

I'm Patrick, aged 43.

How long have you been into home cinema?

Since about 25 years – the first time I heard *Top Gun* played on VHS through a Pro-Logic system. I've been through all of the phases from that to rear-projection, LaserDisc, THX and just about everything in between.

The dream was always to have a dedicated cinema and this room has been a labour of love for a couple of years in trying to get it right.

What hardware is currently in your system?

I have a 120in Sapphire SFSC266 fixed-frame projector screen, used with an Optoma HD141X 3D 1080p projector (and 10 pairs of 3D glasses). My speaker system is 5.1.2 and uses Jamo E350s for front and rear channels,





The room offers plenty of seating for family movie night



a Q Acoustics 2000 centre speaker, Monitor Audio C165 in-ceiling speakers for Atmos, and a REL T5 subwoofer. This is driven by an Onkyo TX-NR636 AVR, with a Sony BD player, Apple TV 4K, Sky+HD, Amazon Fire TV 4K and Pro-Ject turntable as sources. I also have Philips Hue side and ceiling lights, plus Alexa full voice control via a Logitech Harmony Hub.

Did you get any help fitting out the room?

No. I did it all myself, from the ceiling lights and speakers, PJ and screen mounting to the wiring and the decorating. It was one of those ever-evolving D.I.Y. projects!

What was the last thing you added to your setup?

Alexa and the Harmony Hub. I've tinkered for years trying to get the simplest and best control setup and think I have finally found it.

Are you thinking of upgrading anything soon?

First stop will be some new front speakers – the Jamos are in need of an upgrade. Then the big decision is the upgrade to a 4K projector...

Is there a particular 4K PJ you have your eye on?

I've always been a huge fan of the Optoma range – they have a great balance of quality, reliability and picture alongside cost effectiveness. I'd say at the minute we're dead set on the UHD65 – sooner rather than later! ➤

And your favourite bit of kit?

I'm loving the new Alexa and Harmony control system, but my favourite piece of kit is the fixed-frame screen – it has made a huge difference to the quality of display, and really made the room feel like a true 'home' cinema.

What movies/discs do you use to show off your system?

Interstellar, *Avatar*, *Tron: Legacy* and any of the new *Star Trek* movies.

And what are your Top 5 favourite flicks?

Interstellar, *Kick-Ass*, *Seven*, *The Shawshank Redemption* and *Back to the Future*.

Do you stream movies/TV from Netflix/Amazon/Sky etc?

Apple TV is our go-to device for streaming – almost everything we watch is from here, including Netflix for TV shows. The Amazon Fire fills in the blanks!

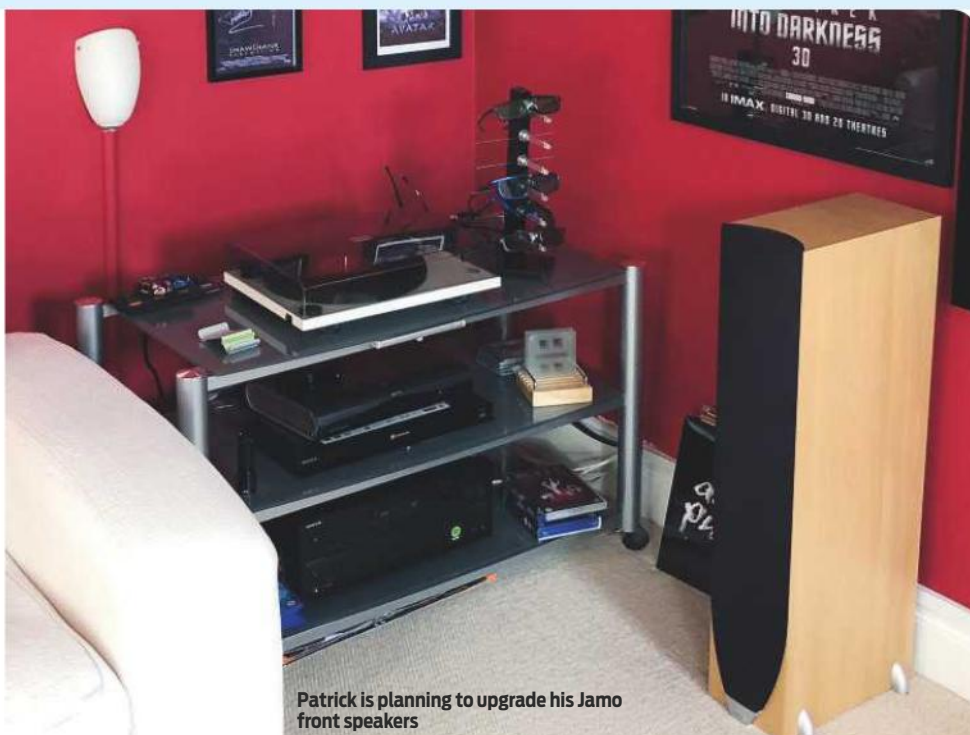
How often do you settle down for movie night?

We have a 'real' movie night once a week – a popcorn, good movie, lights down sort of night – but the room gets used at least a couple of other nights of the week for shows such as *Game of Thrones* and the new *Star Trek: Discovery*.

Our 13-year-old daughter is very fond of using the room with friends as well. We love that it's a real family room so we always have family and friends around. It's become a real focal point of the house.

What do friends and family think of the cinema?

They all love it and will find any excuse to pop round for a movie or sporting event. New visitors always think we are crazy but then they sit down and enjoy a night with us and they totally get the 'why' part of home cinema. The room has become the best investment we've ever made ■



Patrick is planning to upgrade his Jamo front speakers



Share your cinema system in the mag!

If you want to be in **HCC**, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips...

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch

movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.

4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.

5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!
6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

Now what?

Email your images to **letters@homecinemachoice.com** with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and provide your answers to the questions above – then we'll be in touch!



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Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Brendan** mixes his passion for vinyl with a living room cinema setup offering 4K visuals, simplified control and an eye for an AV bargain...



Wharfedale's DX-1SE package
– sleek and compact

Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame – introduce yourself!

I'm Brendan Geoghagen, from Dublin. I work as an IT Networks Manager.

How long have you been into home cinema?

This is probably a two-part answer. Initially, at home with my parents, I was the movie one, always buying new tech to stuff into my Mam

and Dads' living room. When we got our own home that allowed me to build out my own setup from budget surround to what I have today. So you could say I've been dabbling for a long time.

What hardware's in your AV setup?

My system is in my living room. The screen is a wall-mounted 55in LG 4K LED TV, fed

from a Denon AVR-X2300W receiver.

My speakers are the Wharfedale DX-1SEs (5.1) in sleek black – both the AV receiver and speakers were purchased recently following your glowing reviews in HCC #268 early last year.

Sources include a Sky Q Silver PVR, Sony PS3 and a Sony UBP-X800 player. A Logitech Harmony 650 ties it all together, controlling all my devices with a single remote.



Kong: Skull Island – a demo favourite

Roughly how much have you spent on your cinema?

As far as mid-range/budget setups go it's not all that hard on the pocket – a total of around €2,000 for all the tech in the system.

What was the last thing you added to the setup?

I've bought a vinyl phono stage for my Denon receiver to pull my Pro-Ject Essentials 2 vinyl deck into the mix. I've also upgraded its cartridge to make my vinyl pop.

Are you thinking of upgrading anything soon?

I would love the space to build a dedicated cinema room, maybe an extension in the future... Who knows?

What's your favourite bit of kit?

The Denon AVR. It's so versatile and makes all my sources sound great. It has everything you might need for a living room setup.

What movies/discs do you use to show off the system?

Well, I've recently played *The Martian* on Blu-ray which looked and sounded fabulous. But I find *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* and *Kong: Skull Island* both look amazing on Blu-ray. Texture, depth and clarity of the image really comes through. The speakers and amplifier are easy to show off with atmospheric movies like those – you're able to hear every footstep and subtle movement.

And what are your Top 5 favourite flicks?

Personal favourites would be *Heartbreak Ridge* with Clint Eastwood, *Skyfall*, *Saving Private Ryan* and any of the Dark Knight films. *Olympus Has Fallen* is a great popcorn movie, too.

Do you stream movies/TV from Netflix/Amazon/Sky etc?

Yes. The 4K TV has a number of services built

in and my subscriptions extend from the Sky Q store into the 4K Netflix options, which look great.

Is the setup used regularly?

Every day for regular television, and at weekends I indulge with a new Blu-ray title (much to my wife's dislike, as she doesn't like the sub much...).

What do family and friends think of the cinema?

They don't really get my fascination with AV tech. My wife certainly doesn't like the complexity of it all. But those that understand the joy and escapism a good movie can bring are impressed when they see it in action.

Have you any plans to add Dolby Atmos/DTS:X?

I've no immediate plans for Atmos. My living room doesn't lend itself well to all the speakers. Nor does my wife, for that matter! ■



Brendan's Pro-Ject turntable adds vinyl replay to his system



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PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **SHIN GODZILLA** Giant monster returns to terrorise Tokyo in hi-def **MOTHER!** Darren Aronofsky's controversial chiller hits 4K Blu-ray **DOCTOR WHO: SHADA** Tom Baker gets animated **SUSPIRIA** Italian horror classic restored to its Technicolor glory **THE DARK KNIGHT TRILOGY** Holy Ultra HD Blu-ray boxsets, Batman! **& MORE!**

No more clowning around...

IT → Warner Bros. → All-region BD



Pennywise the Dancing Clown is primed to terrify audiences once again as last year's smash hit bigscreen adaptation of Stephen King's *IT* comes home. Find out if *IT* actually lives up to the horrific hype as we take the Blu-ray for a spin on p94...

HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

'Did you guys ever see that film *The Goonies*?'



'They all float down here...'

Blockbuster remake cements author's position as the undisputed King of the horror genre



→ IT

Everybody knows that clowns are creepy, but there's one in particular that towers above all the rest when it comes to giving you the heebie-jeebies: Pennywise the Dancing Clown from Stephen King's mammoth 1986 bestseller *IT*.

Argentine director Andy Muschietti's film adaptation deals with the epic length of King's book by cutting it in two and only covering the first half of the story. As such, this film wisely restricts itself to following its group of seven protagonists (the Losers' Club) as young kids who find themselves the targets of the shape-shifting, child-eating entity whose favourite guise is that of a sinister clown.

Compared to the earlier 1990 TV miniseries (which, let's face it, is only really remembered for Tim Curry's playful portrayal of Pennywise), this new film is an improvement in every way. The young cast is superb and the greater focus on their characters' home lives really drives home why all should be such perfect targets for Pennywise. And speaking of the clown, Bill Skarsgard is utterly terrifying in the role, really embracing the creature's most bestial, otherworldly aspects and giving us something completely different to what Curry offered.

The decision to shift the story from the 1950s to the 1980s always pays off, allowing *IT* to ride the same wave of nostalgia that has

worked so well for *Stranger Things* (which is only fitting as that Netflix show is basically *Stephen King's Greatest Hits* in all but name). Best of all, however, is that this *IT* is unashamedly a horror film. It sets out its stall from the start with a shocking recreation of the book's memorable opening scene and then spends the rest of its running time doing its best to scare the hell out of you.

Picture: *IT* arrives on Blu-ray with an excellent 2.40:1 1080p encode. Although the palette favours more neutral tones, any areas of primary colour (such as Pennywise's red balloons) are nicely saturated and pop off the screen. Shadow detailing is also very well handled – a good thing too considering how dark and gloomy some of the settings are.

Audio: The film's Dolby Atmos soundtrack isn't the most expansive you'll ever hear, but it still makes effective use of the height channels to up the fright-factor with creepy audio cues (such as the children singing *Oranges and Lemons* during Chapter 4's sewer sequence). Your other speakers also get plenty of use, with discrete surround effects coming into play throughout the film.

Extras: The Blu-ray hosts two excellent featurettes dealing with the film's juvenile leads and Bill Skarsgard's portrayal of Pennywise; an interview with Stephen King; and 11 deleted scenes – most of which will no doubt appear in the Director's Cut that is apparently on the way.



HCC VERDICT

IT

→ Warner Bros. → All-region BD
→ £25

WE SAY: A superior horror remake that also delivers plenty of AV thrills on Blu-ray. Roll on Part Two...

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Jungle

Signature Entertainment
All-region BD → £20



A bravura performance by Daniel Radcliffe and exotic location shooting add an extra frisson of excitement to director

Greg (Wolf Creek) McLean's meandering retelling of the true story of a young Israeli adventurer who spent 19 days lost in the Bolivian jungle after getting separated from his friends. The decision to shoot the film on location in Columbia also results in a particularly lush visual palette that is handsomely reproduced on Blu-ray. Supporting the imagery is a pleasingly atmospheric DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix that brings the setting to life. The disc also includes over two hours of interviews.



Wind River

STX → Region B BD
£25



Taylor Sheridan, the writer of *Sicario* and *Hell or High Water*, works double-duty as

writer and director on this refreshingly straightforward murder mystery set on an Indian reservation in Wyoming. As with those previous neo-Westerns, *Wind River* is more concerned with characterisation than tricky plotting, but is no less gripping for it. Shot digitally using Arri Alexa cameras, the film arrives on Blu-ray with a crisply detailed 2.40:1 Full HD encode, joined by an immersive DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. Two deleted scenes and three short featurettes make for disappointing extras.



Detroit

EntertainmentOne → Region B BD
£25



Director Kathryn Bigelow re-teams with *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty* scribe Mark Boal for this recreation of the events that allegedly took place at the Algiers Motel

during the riots that rocked Detroit in the Summer of 1967. A gut-wrenching and, sadly, still far too relevant exploration of racism and police brutality in the US, *Detroit* is an incredibly potent piece of filmmaking, albeit one that is very difficult to actually sit through. In addition to an authentically 'gritty' 1.85:1 1080p encode and boisterous DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, Universal's Blu-ray houses six interesting, but brief, featurettes.



In the shadow of Fukushima

Monster movie reboot re-establishes Godzilla as an allegorical force of nature

→ SHIN GODZILLA

Having rested its world-famous giant beastie since 2004's *Godzilla: Final Wars*, the success of the 2014 Hollywood reboot convinced Japanese studio Toho that the time was right to bring Godzilla back to his homeland. But rather than playing it safe, Toho hired visionary filmmakers Hideaki Anno and Shinji Higuchi (best known for the *Neon Genesis Evangelion* series) to give new life to the franchise.

Ignoring everything that went before, 2016's *Shin Godzilla* (aka *New Godzilla*) goes back to basics with both its story about the creature's first attack on Tokyo and its re-framing of the monster itself as a living metaphor for the 2011 tsunami and subsequent Fukushima nuclear disaster (just as the 1954 original did for the bombing of Hiroshima).

However, any viewers whose limited expectations of *Godzilla* films go no further than scenes of mass destruction may feel even more short-changed by *Shin Godzilla* than they were by Gareth Edwards's US movie. While the radically redesigned and constantly evolving monster (itself a divisive issue for franchise fans) tramples all over Tokyo, the real point of Anno's script is to highlight the bureaucracy and fossilised thinking that bogs down Japan's government and renders it unable to provide a quick or effective response to a crisis.

More than anything else, this bold new addition to the franchise proves that Godzilla remains every bit as potent an allegory as it was when the creature first took to the screen 64 years ago.

Picture: This two-disc set offers up separate 2.40:1 encodes of the Japanese and English versions of the



film (the differences really coming down to onscreen text). Picture quality across both is very good, delivering a sharp and densely detailed 1080p image that has no trouble handling the scenes of largescale destruction. The only real negatives come from the CG-rendering of Godzilla itself, which frequently looks a little softer than the live-action footage.

Audio: The filmmakers originally wanted *Shin Godzilla* to further homage the original film with a mono soundtrack. Thankfully, they were persuaded to go (a little) bigger with the film's audio and we've ended up with a pair of Japanese and English 3.1 DTS-HD MA soundtracks. The resulting soundscapes aren't as expansive as you'd expect for a film of this kind, but bass response is effective and Shiro Sagisu's score sounds utterly wonderful.

Extras: Focusing exclusively on the film's digital FX, the Blu-ray extras consist of a trio of lengthy reels of pre-viz footage and visual effects breakdowns.



Shin Godzilla is Toho's 29th film in the iconic movie franchise

HCC VERDICT

Shin Godzilla

→ Manga Entertainment
→ Region B BD → £20

WE SAY: A solid Blu-ray package for a surprisingly smart movie. All hail the reborn king of the monsters!

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



Call of Duty: WWII

Activision → PS4, Xbox One, Windows PC
→ £60

The *Call of Duty* first-person shooter series is one of the longest-standing and most regular, with at least one new outing each year since the early noughties. However, it has been in decline recently, with fantastical plots and settings replacing realism, slowly diluting what initially made *COD* so great.

That's why a return to World War II, where it all started, is most welcome. And thanks to the 4K visuals available on higher-end PCs and games consoles, we've never had a grittier, more tangible visit to that particular period of conflict.

It's hard to say it's enjoyable, thanks to the subject, but it is. Very. Developer Sledgehammer Games has created something of beauty and brawn that is a treat in both single and multiplayer modes.

The single-player campaign is poignant and engrossing, if a little short. It puts you in the shoes of a typical US army grunt, but from the Normandy beach landings onwards, your trigger finger skill will be matched with tactical nous and some outstanding set-pieces. We also approve of the decision to revert to the collection of health packs to rebuild strength. It makes the gameplay more considered than the miraculous health regeneration evidenced in latter-day *Call of Duty* titles.

Multiplayer has also been refined to be more visceral than the run-and-gun style familiar from other *CODs* and similar games. We particularly like the new *War Mode*, with its set mid-mission goals giving a better sense of achievement when completed. In one you must defend a farmhouse, attack a bridge, then guide a tank to a target point, all within strict time-limits. Your team then swaps duties with your rivals to see how far they get.

Other multiplayer staples (including the ever-present *Zombies*) are there too, of course. But, thanks to the new (old) setting, they feel a little more emotional than before.

This is partly thanks to an amazing use of sound, especially if you have your surround sound system turned up to the max. Explosions rock you to the core, while the bullets from the many weapons you use have their own audio signatures. And the most spectacular scenes in the story mode will have your neighbours banging on the wall in shock and awe – either that, or they'll be hiding in their cellars waiting for the all clear...



When the Wind Blows

BFI → Region B BD & R2 DVD
£20



Based on a graphic novel by Raymond Briggs, this chilling 1986 animated look at life in the immediate aftermath of a nuclear war couldn't be further removed from the author's 1982

smash *The Snowman*. Made using a mix of photographed model sets overlaid with cel animated characters, this 1.37:1-framed BD encode suffers from some unavoidable issues involving baked-in dirt and flickering, but still looks decent. The BFI has also assembled a superb mix of behind-the-scenes and contextual extras, including 20 grimly fascinating Public Information films.



The Apartment: Limited Edition

Arrow Academy → Region B BD
£30



When Arrow Video announced that it would be releasing a new Blu-ray edition of Billy Wilder's masterful 1960 comic drama, it was hard to imagine just how much it could really hope to

improve on MGM's already impressive 2012 release. How naive we were. As good as that previous 1080p presentation looked, this new 4K restoration (sourced from the original 35mm negative) improves on it in almost every regard, from sharpness and black levels to additional clean-up work. The extensive set of bonus features even includes a helpful restoration demo to point out just how much work went into this new encode.



Bottle Rocket

The Criterion Collection → Region B BD
£28



The Criterion Collection's mission to release definitive editions of Wes Anderson's entire filmography continues with this Blu-ray outing for his 1996 debut feature. Co-written

by Anderson and Owen Wilson (who also stars in the film with his brother Luke), this quirky crime comedy is perfectly enjoyable – despite lacking the signature style the filmmaker would bring to bear on his subsequent projects. As well as attractive film-like 1.85:1 Full HD visuals and modest DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics, Criterion has bolstered the release with a fan-pleasing suite of extras.





Tom Baker gives a particularly animated performance in this new version of *Shada*



Better late than never...

Almost four decades after production began, this lost *Doctor Who* serial finally hits the screen

→ DOCTOR WHO: SHADA

Had everything gone to plan the 1979-1980 series of *Doctor Who* would have ended with a six-part serial written by outgoing script editor Douglas Adams involving a Time Lord masquerading as a Cambridge professor, the titular prison planetoid, and an alien genius who wants to absorb every living being in the universe into a single hive mind. But it wasn't to be...

While the location filming and the first of three studio shoots were completed, industrial action brought the production to a standstill. Unable to get studio time even when the strike was called off (due to delayed Christmas specials being given priority), *Shada* was left incomplete. Some clips were used in 1983's *The Five Doctors*, but *Shada* itself was left to languish in the vaults, never to see the light of day. Except it has, several times...

First, in 1992 came a VHS release that used new footage of Tom Baker narrating the missing material. Then, in 2007, came a webcast audio play retooled for Paul McGann's Doctor, accompanied by Flash animations. Skip forward to 2017 and the BBC hired the team responsible for the animated rebuild of *The Power of the Daleks* to do something similar for *Shada*.

Presented as a feature-



length movie, this new *Shada* is entertaining, if not quite the lost classic that some fans have proclaimed it to be over the years – it's certainly no *City of Death*. What is impressive, however, is how well the new production holds together. While the shifts from live-action to animation can be a little jarring to start with, it's not long before you cease to notice them. The production team also deserves a big pat on the back for the brand new live-action inserts and models shot for this release, which blend seamlessly with the rest of the footage.

Picture: Due to the various sources, the 1.37:1 1080i Blu-ray encode experiences some obvious quality fluctuations. The new animated sequences naturally look incredibly sharp and colourful, while the archival 16mm location footage has been re-scanned in HD and looks pretty damn good too. However, the old studio work was shot on video and, when upscaled here, looks about as ropery as you'd expect.

Audio: The piece-meal soundtrack is made up of a mix of original archival audio, new dialogue recorded by the cast especially for this release, and a brand-new score. The result, available in a choice of DTS-HD MA dual-mono, stereo and 5.1 incarnations, sounds very good, easily recreating the sound design of a '70s *Doctor Who* serial.

Extras: Across the set's two Blu-ray discs you'll find a wealth of bonus bits including an almost guerilla-style commentary; a *Making of...* featurette; a look at how industrial action impacted the show over the years; raw studio session footage; deleted scenes; location tours; and extensive DVD-ROM goodies.



Tom Baker even appears in a new live-action scene for the reconstruction



HCC VERDICT

Doctor Who: Shada

→ BBC Worldwide → All-region BD
→ £25

WE SAY: Another excellent animated reconstruction of a lost *Doctor Who* serial. More please...

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Four tales of the unexpected...

Another return visit to the Hammer vaults results in more high-definition treats for fright fans



→ HAMMER HORRORS

Following a lengthy period with no new releases, the back-end of 2017 saw Hammer horror fans rewarded for their patience with Blu-ray debuts for several of the studio's classic films. In what we hope is a good sign for the coming year, 2018 gets underway with Studiocanal unleashing four more of Hammer's vintage fright films on the format.

Rather than continuing the Peter Cushing series of films, *The Horror of Frankenstein* (1970) basically reboots the franchise with Ralph Bates playing the young Victor Frankenstein. As well as a new leading man, the other major change this new film brought with it was a far broader strain of humour, which diminishes the scares and makes it seem more like a parody of what went before.

Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde (1971) started off as a joke over lunch, but ended up as one of the studio's best films of the decade. Starring Ralph Bates and Martine Beswick, it's a wickedly nasty romp that throws together its gender-based twist on the familiar Jekyll and Hyde story with elements of the Jack the Ripper and Burke and Hare cases.

Psychological thriller *Straight on Till Morning* (1972) finds an awkward young woman (Rita Tushingham) moving to London and falling for a strange young man (Shane Briant) who harbours some very dark secrets. Add to that a host of references to *Peter Pan* and some wild editing and you have a curious thriller that regularly manages to catch you off guard.



All four of Studiocanal's BD releases feature newly commissioned sleeve art

To the Devil a Daughter (1976) has developed something of a bad rep over the years, but judged on its own merits (comparisons with 1968's *The Devil Rides Out* do it no favours) it's a reasonably effective chiller with one of the best casts the studio ever assembled (including Richard Widmark, Christopher Lee and Nastassja Kinski). It's just a shame that the finale makes no sense whatsoever.

Picture: All four films receive excellent 1.66:1-framed 1080p restorations on Blu-ray. Colours are nicely saturated, black levels are stable, there's no significant print damage to be seen. That said, *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde* does stand out from the others, simply because its fog-shrouded aesthetic robs it of a little sharpness and cuts back on the amount of detail inherent in the film's photography.

Audio: The four soundtracks have also undergone thorough clean-ups and the resulting quartet of DTS-HD MA 2.0 dual-mono mixes prove to be very effective in their handling of dialogue, Foley effects and music – particularly given the natural limitations of the source material.

Extras: Each of the films is accompanied by its own retrospective *Making of...* doc featuring Hammer experts Kevin Lyons, John J. Johnston, Jonathan Rigby and Alan Barnes (plus actresses Veronica Carlson and Martine Beswick for *The Horror of Frankenstein* and *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, respectively). All of the discs, except *The Horror of Frankenstein*, also include a trailer. Sadly, there's no sign of any of the chat-tracks or featurettes from earlier DVD releases.

HCC VERDICT

The Horror of Frankenstein

→ Studiocanal → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £25

WE SAY: A good-looking HD outing for this lacklustre horror-comedy.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT

Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde

→ Studiocanal → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £25

WE SAY: One of Hammer's best and the pick of this wave of Blu-rays.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT

Straight on Till Morning

→ Studiocanal → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £25

WE SAY: A strong hi-def showing for this quirky psychological thriller.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

HCC VERDICT

To the Devil a Daughter

→ Studiocanal → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £25

WE SAY: This vintage horror is better than its reputation suggests.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



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We've all heard of painting the town red, but this is taking things a little too literally...



Technicolor terror still dazzles

Dario Argento's legendary horror film gets a new lease of life courtesy of this 4K restoration

→ SUSPIRIA: LIMITED EDITION

This 1977 horror stars Jessica Harper as Suzy Banyon, an American ballet student attending a prestigious dance academy in Germany. Suzy's arrival coincides with the brutal murder of another student and, before long, she must confront the dark secret that lies at the heart of the academy.

Having made his name with a quartet of grisly, yet artful, *giallo* thrillers, Italian filmmaker Dario Argento left these conventional whodunnits behind and dove head-first into the world of supernatural horror with this twisted fairy-tale. While the plot itself is pretty thin, it's really little more than a backdrop for Argento to orchestrate a series of stunning set-pieces that seem to exist solely in order to overwhelm audiences via a direct assault on their senses...

Picture: *Suspiria* made its Blu-ray debut in the UK on the short-lived Cine-Excess label back in 2010. Sadly, that initial release had some major issues with colour accuracy and blown-out highlights that only served to ruin the film's striking visuals.

This second UK Blu-ray release is based on a 2016 4K restoration of the film's original 35mm camera negatives (with Intermediate Negative inserts and Intermediate Positive elements used to replace any missing frames). It was undertaken by Germany's TLEFilms Film Restoration & Preservation Services to celebrate the *Suspiria*'s 40th anniversary.

The resulting 2.35:1-framed 1080p encode is a massive improvement on its predecessor. Not only does the entire transfer now have a far more organic,



film-like appearance to it, there's also additional detail on display thanks to the corrected brightness and contrast, not to mention the vastly superior black levels.

The all-important colour saturation is also much improved (particularly those rich reds). However, it would appear that a more recent 4K restoration undertaken by Synapse Films in the US for its own Limited Edition Region A Blu-ray release improves even more on this aspect (although we have yet to see the finished disc for ourselves). Even so, we don't imagine anyone who picks up this UK release will be disappointed with what they see.

Audio: The Blu-ray includes a choice of DTS-HD MA 5.1 and LPCM 2.0 mixes in both English and Italian (but not the original four-track stereo mix that appears on Synapse's US Blu-ray). The 5.1 remixes do wonders for the film's aggressive sound design and the iconic score from Goblin – although, curiously, the English-language 5.1 track is noticeably louder (and therefore more 'in-your-face') than the three other soundtrack options.

Extras: Ported over from the earlier Cine-Excess Blu-ray is a typically informative commentary by Kim Newman and Alan Jones, plus two fairly lengthy interview featurettes with various academics and filmmakers offering their thoughts on the film and the development of the Italian horror genre.

New to this release is a fascinating 57-minute documentary about the restoration, a 27-minute interview with Argento and a brief intro by the director that plays in front of the film.

HCC VERDICT

Suspiria: Limited Edition

→ Cult Films → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £25

WE SAY: Even if it doesn't end up being the definitive version, this is still an impressive HD outing for Argento's psychedelic horror classic.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Leatherface

Lionsgate → R2 DVD
£16



The *Texas Chainsaw* franchise is surely the most confusing series of horror films around. This is the eighth film in

the series, and the second to bear the title *Leatherface*; it's also the second attempt at exploring the killer's origins. Despite enjoyably over-ripe performances from Stephen Dorff and Lili Taylor, this pointless prequel turns out to be every bit as dismal as you'd expect, lacking both the morbid humour and palpable terror of Tobe Hooper's 1974 original. In addition to a good-looking anamorphic 2.40:1 transfer and dynamic DD 5.1 mix, the DVD houses a *Making of...* and six deleted scenes.



Luther the Geek

88 Films → All-region BD
£20



Every slasher film worth its salt gives its villain a killer gimmick – and this late '80s fright flick doesn't disappoint,

serving up a memorably freaky carnival geek-inspired loony (played by Edward Terry) who communicates only via chicken-like clucks and enjoys attacking people with his metal gnashers. Well worth a look for slasher fans, this enjoyably demented film arrives on Blu-ray with a finely textured 1.78:1 1080p encode and reasonable LPCM 2.0 audio. Bonus goodies consist of three interviews, the trailer and an appreciation of the film by genre buff Calum Waddell.



The Cat O' Nine Tails: Limited Edition

Arrow Video → Region A/B BD
£30



This 1970 *giallo* about a blind former reporter investigating a series of murders linked to a research facility may

not rank among director Dario Argento's best-loved works, but Arrow's impressive new 4K restoration is sure to win it some new admirers. In addition to the best AV presentation the film has ever enjoyed (which also includes a choice of DTS-HD MA mono Italian and English soundtracks), this Blu-ray includes a chat-track by Kim Newman and Alan Jones, four new interviews and a script reconstruction of the original ending.



A Ghost Story

Lionsgate → Region B BD
£25



The supernatural has been used to explore ideas of love and loss many times over the years – not least in the

'90s smash hit *Ghost*. But whereas that film delighted viewers with the sight of Patrick Swayze and Demi Moore getting saucy with a potter's wheel, *A Ghost Story* gives us Casey Affleck with a sheet over his head and Rooney Mara eating an entire pie in an interminable single take. This pretentious, self-consciously arty flick arrives on BD with a suitably drab 1.33:1 1080p encode and lifeless DTS-HD MA 5.1 audio. Extras include a chat-track and interviews with the filmmakers.



Beyond all of our expectations?

DTV sci-fi flick shows you should never write-off a sequel because of its dismal predecessor

→ BEYOND SKYLINE

People haven't exactly been crying out for a sequel to the underwhelming 2010 alien abduction thriller *Skyline*. But here we are eight years later and not only has a sequel appeared, but it's also a lot more fun than its forebear. That's not to say that *Beyond Skyline* is itself a dazzling work of genius, but as far as direct-to-DVD action schlock goes, it's definitely in the upper echelon.

In a complete turnaround of *Skyline*'s single confined location gimmick, this equally low-budget sequel wastes little time in moving the action out of Los Angeles and onto an alien spacecraft before crashing to Earth in Laos for a showdown between a rag-tag army of humans and CGI war machines. It may feel as random and piecemeal as the plot from a videogame, but we'd rather that than having to spend an hour-and-a-half watching people hiding behind a sofa all over again.

It also helps that *Beyond Skyline* largely moves away from the whiny, entitled Millennials that populated the first film and trades them in for Frank 'The Purge: Anarchy' Grillo and Iko 'The Raid' Uwais. This results in far more likeable lead characters, and you just know that they're the sort of people who won't take an alien invasion lying down. The heroes here are more than happy to kick any slimy E.T. that crosses their path.

If you want coherent storytelling look elsewhere. If you want to see an Indonesian actor star using his martial arts skills to kill a bunch of rubber-suited aliens, then *Beyond Skyline* is the film for you.



Picture: *Beyond Skyline*'s cleanly-rendered 2.40:1-framed 1080p encode does a pretty good job of masking the film's low-budget origins. Colour reproduction is very strong and blacks are impenetrably deep (to the detriment of shadow detail at times). However, fine textures aren't always as well defined as you'd expect, and there are some obvious issues with banding during the train tunnel scenes in the first Chapter.

Audio: While it can hardly compete with major Hollywood productions such as *Independence Day* or *War of the Worlds*, this DTV alien invasion flick's DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix still delivers plenty of room-filling effects. Surrounds are employed aggressively from the start and action scenes are underpinned by tight, responsive bursts of LFE. Dialogue and music are also well handled.

Extras: Clearly the aliens have abducted all of the extras, as this disc is as barebones as they come.



HCC VERDICT

Beyond Skyline

→ Signature Entertainment
→ All-region BD → £20

WE SAY: An enjoyably silly DTV sci-fi actioner that is let down on BD by a complete absence of extras.

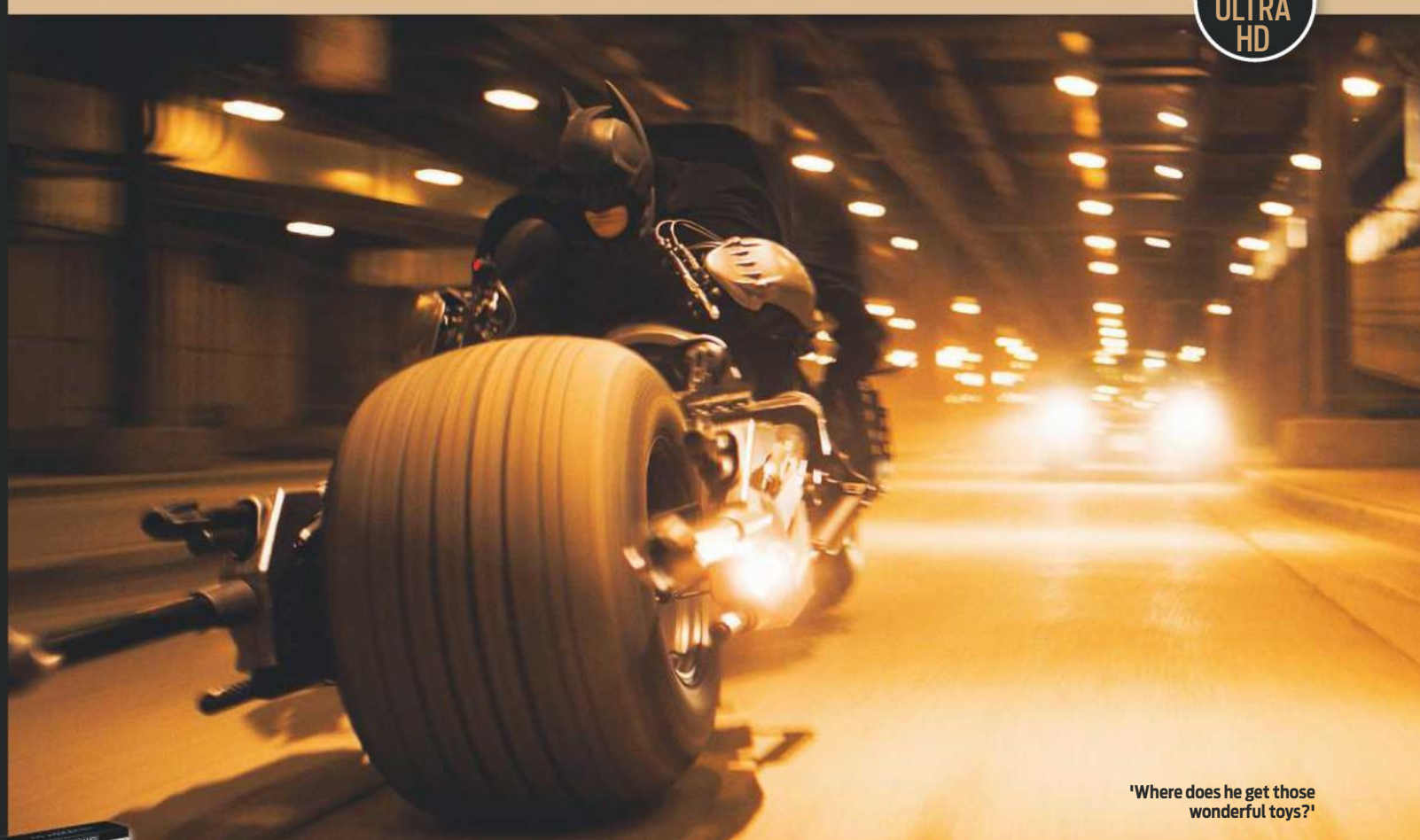
Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



The Dark Knight rises once more

Bale's Batman stuns Scarecrow, jousts with the Joker and battles Bane in 4K HDR



With Bane, Tom Hardy outdid Christian Bale in the 'gruff voice' stakes

→ THE DARK KNIGHT TRILOGY

We all know the story. 1997's woeful *Batman and Robin* saw Warner Bros. put the Caped Crusader into retirement, only for the later success of *X-Men* and *Spider-Man* to give the studio reason to think a new take on the comic hero might be worthwhile. Director Christopher Nolan, fresh from thrillers *Memento* and *Insomnia*, was given licence to reboot the franchise with an altogether different feel.

The resulting trilogy, with Christian Bale behind the mask, proved much more successful on the day-glo disaster of *Batman and Robin*. The villains, including Heath Ledger's Joker and Tom Hardy's Bane, are better; the location filming adds a much needed air of realism; and the trilogy works as a whole through its consistent style and themes. Nolan's handling of action lacks the visceral, kinetic flavour of rival series, but for grown-up comic thrills, these movies are hard to beat.

Picture: All three films in 4K HDR show a difference over their 1080p SDR brethren, making this boxset an easy upgrade recommendation, although quality varies across them.

Batman Begins is technically the least ambitious of the three, filmed by Nolan on 35mm in 2.40:1, while

its sequels incorporate IMAX capture (and the discs subsequently feature 1.78:1 sequences). It's also the least visually opulent of the titles here. Increased definition isn't always obvious – some shots, such as the interiors of Ra's al Ghul's temple in Chapter 3, feel flat and muddy; the facial features of a young Bruce Wayne, riding the monorail in Chapter 4, lack that 4K-specific detail, seeming curiously soft. HDR grading is subtle.

The Dark Knight and *The Dark Knight rises* fare better. The former's IMAX-shot bank robbery sequence dazzles with its textural detail (although edges, as before, are sometimes distractingly sharp...), and greatly increased dynamic range.

In fact, it's the application of HDR that makes the most obvious change to the viewing experience. Scenes frequently play out with a brighter feel than before.

Audio: DTS-HD MA 5.1 mixes are offered across the set (there are no 3D audio remixes here), and all are strong affairs, with excellent clarity and heft.

Extras: Each film gets a 1080p disc devoted to extras, which are ports from the previous BDs. There's a good amount of in-depth stuff here, even including the hidden Joker-version trailer for *The Dark Knight*.



HCC VERDICT

The Dark Knight Trilogy

→ Warner Bros. → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £60

WE SAY: A welcome UHD boxset for the fan-favourite trilogy – but not the last word in AV quality.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



Going to infinity and beyond...

Spectacular 4K remaster takes this epic sci-fi adventure to even greater heights

→ INTERSTELLAR

Christopher Nolan followed *The Dark Knight Rises* with this 2014 sci-fi that feels like a companion piece of sorts to *2001: A Space Odyssey* (only with better science) and put his directorial talents to the fore.

Matthew McConaughey, Anne Hathaway and Matt Damon are along for the ride as Nolan and screenwriter-brother Jonathan cook up a tale of interstellar travel and human perseverance, and one that can withstand a few bumps in the narrative along the way.

Picture: The popularity of *Interstellar* among home cinema hedz is only going to improve with this UHD release – image quality here is excellent, finding exquisite detail and impact from Chris Nolan's masterful direction.

The movie's shot-on-film origins no doubt help (including IMAX cameras, with some sequences here switching from the 2.40:1 ratio to a taller 1.78:1), as does Nolan's own apparent input into the HDR processing. Fine image elements are in rich supply; the 4K image picks up costume details and set design, and this in turn adds depth to the picture.

True, there's frequently little in Nolan's stark palette to excite your display's colour engine (even the WB logo is presented in muted brown), but beauty comes from elsewhere: the fine, greying stubble on John Lithgow's unshaven chin; the sharp FX shots of Chapter 8's celestial journey; the general balance of tone and light. This is a sterling presentation of a movie where awe-inspiring imagery is a vital component.



'Look, hopefully there's fish fingers in here'

Audio: Again, no 3D audio option here, with Nolan and Warner sticking with the movie's previous DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix. As 'flat' tracks go, this is a corker, with the thunderous LFE in Chapter 17's worm-hole moment a particular highlight. Hans Zimmer's thoughtful score sounds sweet and rich.

Extras: This release's third disc carries the film's original BD extras, namely the 50-minute *The Science of Interstellar* documentary (featuring *bona fide* space boffin Kip Thorne), and nearly two hours of behind-the-scenes features, covering various production aspects, under the *Inside Interstellar* banner. Rounding it out are four trailers for the movie.

HCC VERDICT

Interstellar

→ Warner Bros. → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £28

WE SAY: A superb UHD HDR debut for Nolan's ambitious sci-fi drama, and a great overall package.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Dunkirk

Warner Bros. → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £28



Chris Nolan's wonderfully compact WW2 drama feels naturally suited to UHD BD. While HDR implementation here isn't aggressive, it suits the material perfectly, adding

a sense of life-like illumination. Fine detailing, meanwhile, is best-in-class. Nolan's use of 65mm and IMAX cameras, and efficient encoding, means you're never left wanting when it comes to texture and object info. Crowd shots and wide-eyed beach vistas teem with pixel punch and image depth. There's a noticeable reduction in clarity with some of the 65mm 2.20:1 sequences, but that's only a niggle.

★★★★★

Inception

Warner Bros. → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £28



This high-concept heist movie comes to UHD Blu-ray with a 2160p transfer that is likely to leave videophiles as

puzzled as some audiences were by the film's dream-within-a-dream structure. The biggest issue is that many of the film's mid- and long-shots look curiously soft, which only becomes more obvious because of how sharp the close-ups are rendered here. The colour timing of the 4K encode (supervised by Nolan) also runs noticeably hotter than the original Blu-ray release, which causes problems with skin tones. Not bad, but not the 4K demo disc we were hoping for, either.

★★★★★

The Prestige

Warner Bros. → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £28



This 4K upgrade of Christopher Nolan's underrated foray into fantasy cinema works some nifty HDR magic

to reveal slightly more shadow detail and subtle shifts in tone in the film's 2.40:1-framed 35mm photography. It's just a shame that, as with the original Blu-ray release, black levels are rather inconsistent, looking a little washed out on occasion. The film's DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack is more expansive than you may expect and proves the perfect partner to its stylish visuals. A bonus Blu-ray platter houses just 20 minutes of featurettes, four galleries and a trailer.

★★★★★



Get ready for a Rapp attack

Super-spy jumps from the page to the screen with all-too predictable results

→ AMERICAN ASSASSIN

This Jason Bourne-wannabe stars Dylan O'Brien as Mitch Rapp, a serial overachiever whose fiancée is killed during a terrorist attack on a beach. Proving able to infiltrate the terrorist cell responsible single-handedly, Rapp is picked up by US Special Forces and transformed into a slightly-troubled CIA super-assassin ready to save the world from nuclear terrorism with nothing but his 'off the charts' skills.

Packed with corny dialogue, flimsy characters and predictable plot twists, *American Assassin* is clearly no masterpiece. It's not all bad though; Michael Keaton's portrayal of grumpy Cold War veteran and CIA Director Stan Hurley is masterful – and is about the only thing here with any more depth than the 4K Ultra HD disc itself.

Picture: The whole film is shot in a sandy, mellow tone that borders on sepia in some scenes. This robs the picture of colour punch and dynamics, but there is no denying it looks just how the director intended. The 4K Dolby Vision HDR encode, however, sees the picture gain greater depth and realism, with stunning detail in the more shadowy scenes. Close-up shots are crisp, clean and loaded with detail.

After this, switching back to the 1080p version is like putting on yellow-tinted soft-focus glasses. It's not just the resolution; the film seems grainier and darker too. Dodgy hotel rooms and darkened CIA offices become a sea of black and background scenery blurs into insignificance. In 4K, particularly using Dolby Vision HDR, the disc is a great example of how a director can use tailored white balance and a wide colour palette to great advantage.



This is why you don't throw a surprise party for a CIA-trained assassin...

HCC VERDICT

American Assassin

→ Lionsgate → Ultra HD BD & Region B BD → £30

WE SAY: A great-looking, but utterly predictable, action-thriller saved by an on-form Michael Keaton.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Audio: The Atmos sound is hard to fault too. Despite the sledgehammer plot, the film's soundscape uses surround, rear and height channels in a compellingly subtle way, successfully recreating the ambience of each scene while the front speakers deliver the bulk of the action and dialogue. Street scenes benefit from well-placed road noise at ear level but there isn't too much going on in the overheads throughout the film. There is just an occasional whoosh or echo to elicit a greater sense of space.

Extras: Plenty on offer here, with the five behind-the-scenes EPK-style featurettes and some geek-level footage from a post-screening Q&A adding up to more than 90 minutes of material.

A Few Good Men

Sony Pictures → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £30



This 1992 legal drama may not seem like an obvious source of 4K eye candy, but Sony's 2160p presentation

(sourced from a 4K scan of the original 35mm camera negatives) is an absolute joy to behold. Blacks are deep, colours are impeccably realised, detailing is meticulous and the fine layer of film grain is beautifully resolved (and never threatens to overwhelm the image). Although the disc's Dolby Atmos audio upgrade isn't quite as flashy, it does create a convincingly expansive and immersive soundstage. The 4K disc also ports over the chat-track from the BD.



The Emoji Movie

Sony Pictures → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £30



As much as we'd like to just publish a picture of the Pile of Poo emoji here and leave it at that, HCC's paymasters demand more from us, so here goes...

The Emoji Movie is a cynical cash grab that has no aspirations greater than ripping off *Wreck-It Ralph* and *Inside Out* (when it's not selling real-world apps to kids, that is). As diabolical as the film may be, and as ugly as it may look, from a technical standpoint this UHD release's vibrant 4K visuals and expansive Atmos audio are both superb. Extras include a *Hotel Transylvania* short and a tutorial for making a *Candy Crush* Saga cake.



Jumanji

Sony Pictures → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £30

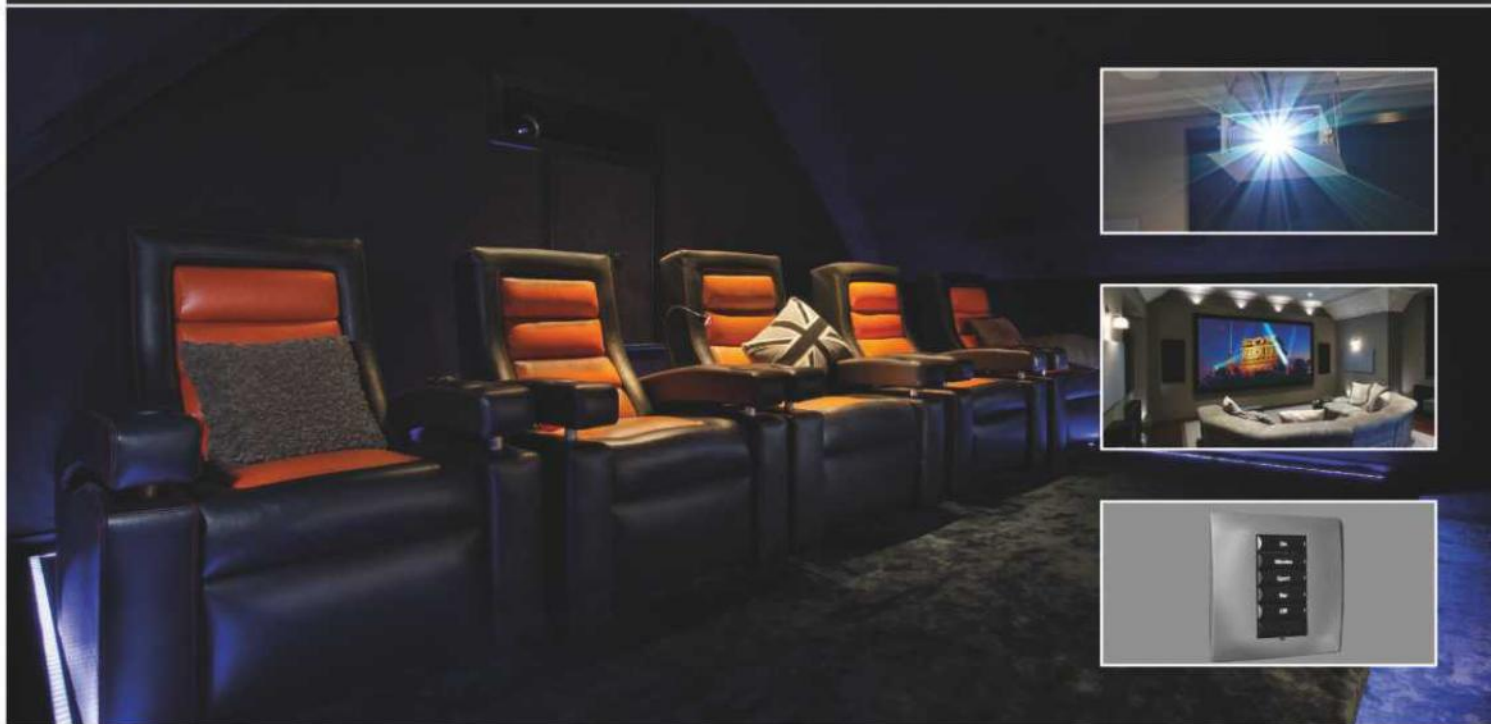


Released on Ultra HD Blu-ray to coincide with the cinema release of the new sequel/reboot, this is thankfully no hasty 4K cash-in. While there are insurmountable problems with *Jumanji*'s rather weightless digital FX (which now looks worse than ever), the 35mm live-action photography looks fine in this UHD HDR remaster. Compared to the old DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack, the 4K release's Dolby Atmos remix is more expansive and impactful – despite a lack of noticeable height effects. In addition to the original extras, the BD in this set also hosts a handful of new goodies.



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Harry now knew why
his sleeves were so big



We're off to see the wizard...

...and it'll be 1,179 minutes until we come back, so don't wait up



Each film now sports a DTS:X soundmix

→ HARRY POTTER: 8-FILM COLLECTION

Once upon a time there was a boy wizard called Harry. He attended wizarding school, made some friends, and had a series of increasingly big-budget adventures across an impossibly successful film franchise. And, as an epilogue, Warner Bros collected all eight of those films and released them in 4K HDR on a big magical boxset. The end... **Picture:** The *Harry Potter: 8-Film Collection* gives each title its own disc, with HDR10 encodes and 2.40:1 aspect ratios. Previously, the final quartet of movies have been available on standalone 4K BDs (via import); this is your first chance to own the whole set.

Image quality is inconsistent, not least because the different directors/cinematographers used across the franchise result in shifts in style and composition, and the quality of FX improves.

Perhaps surprisingly, series opener *...The Philosopher's Stone* is arguably the most impressive; derived from the film's 35mm origins, it retains a film-like

appearance, yet unearths more nuance where resolution and luminance are concerned, and increases colour punch and gradation. The following movies all exhibit 4K merits, although as the tone of the franchise gets darker, so does the general colour palette, leading to encodes like *...Deathly Hallows Part 2* that can occasionally look murky and a little less impressive.

Audio: Sonic makeovers are the order of the day here, with all eight films featuring DTS:X mixes that successfully recast the franchise as next-gen experiences. There's pleasing vertical immersion when necessary, and copious wraparound effects. Without a compatible setup, the tracks default to DTS-HD MA 7.1 mixes – still a step-up over some of the earlier films' original BD outtings.

Extras: While US buyers of *Harry Potter* on 4K get triple-disc editions featuring platters devoted to extras, this boxset dispenses with all supplementary material (and 1080p versions of the films), making it not quite the mighty package it could have been.

HCC VERDICT

Harry Potter: 8-Film Collection

→ Warner Bros. → Ultra HD BD
→ £115

WE SAY: This 4K boxset makes AV magic, but extras succumb to a Vanishing Spell...

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



Some mothers do 'ave 'em

Darren Aronofsky pushes the boundaries in this art-house nightmare

→ MOTHER!

Jennifer Lawrence and Javier Bardem star in this bonkers psycho-horror from writer/director Darren Aronofsky, which will find as many haters as those who admire its gutsy attempt to weave Big Themes (their respective character titles of 'mother' and 'Him' are pretty clear clues to the seam that Aronofsky is mining) into an at times uncomfortably gruesome house-bound chiller that seems permanently on the cusp of descending into nonsense. Indeed, some may well switch off before it shrieks and splatters to its head-twisting conclusion.

Definitely not for everyone, but you can't fault its top-drawer production, sterling performances and sheer bravery.

Picture: Adding an extra layer of weirdness to *mother!* is Aronofsky and cinematographer Matthew Libatique's decision to shoot on 16mm film, which results in a 2.40:1 4K image that runs the gamut from grim to fleetingly gorgeous – and one of the few where SFX shots actually appear crisper. Naturalistic lighting and the movie's real-life sets lead to some shots lacking depth and contrast, yet facial close-ups show excellent detail, and there's a brilliantly organic feel that surely accurately reflects the filmmaker's intent. Fine grain is frequently present.

The accompanying 1080p BD doesn't lag far behind either – again it appears effortlessly natural, and, while a smidge softer, can pack a pleasant sharpness punch despite the source origins.

Audio: There's no score here, so effects work and dialogue are all the tools the Dolby Atmos mix



It was time to sack the lawnmower man

(found on both 4K and Full HD editions) has to immerse you in Aronofsky's feverish vision. It performs admirably in this regard, punctuating silence with robust Foley and playing with sound placement to increase tension. It's crisp, eerie and well-defined.

Extras: *mother!*'s extras are found on its 1080p disc, and comprise just two featurettes. *The Makeup FX of mother!* is brief and inconsequential, but *mother! The Downward Spiral* is a superb 30-minute doc that gives scholarly (as opposed to pointlessly promotional) account of the movie's production. Anyone thrilled by the main feature should give this a spin.

HCC VERDICT

mother!

→ Paramount → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £30

WE SAY: 16mm cinematography, creepy sonics and an oddball story make this an 'interesting' night in.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★

Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets

Lionsgate → Ultra HD BD & Region B BD → £30



The UHD incarnation of this potential Besson cult classic (time will tell...) is slightly underwhelming as neither colour punch or sharpness are greatly improved over

the admittedly stunning HD version. Some of the detailing shows the 4K transfer at its best though. The real trick here is to leverage the disc's HDR chops; the Dolby Vision encode adds masses more dynamism to the lush landscapes and darker locations alike. The moody ship interiors are suitably claustrophobic while the beaches on planet Mul beg you to jump into Speedos and apply sun-screen.

★★★★★

The Hitman's Bodyguard

Lionsgate → Ultra HD BD & Region B BD → £30



Sourced from a 4K digital intermediate (despite only being shot at 3.5K, with VFX rendered at 2K), this

hugely enjoyable action-comedy cuts a very impressive figure on Ultra HD Blu-ray. As clean and sharp as the 2160p image may look, however, it's the colour saturation that's the real highlight here – with the Dolby Vision HDR incarnation looking that bit bolder still. Partnering the awesome 4K visuals is a stonking Atmos mix. Bonuses (repeated across the 4K and Full HD discs) include a chat-track and four featurettes.

★★★★★

Atomic Blonde

Universal Pictures → Ultra HD BD & All-region BD → £30



It may be yet another 2K upscale, but this ultra-stylish Cold War spy thriller is still a bit of a stunner in 4K.

While the urban decay of the exterior locations serve up plenty of intricate detailing, it's the colour-saturated club interiors that really get the most from this Dolby Vision-enabled 2160p encode. On the audio side of things, this UHD release sports the same DTS:X mix as the 'regular' Blu-ray, ensuring it delivers a thrillingly engaging and impactful audio experience. The 4K platter also ports over the filmmakers' commentary from the Full HD disc.

★★★★★

Collecting...

Stephen King

After scaring ourselves silly watching the new Blu-ray release of Stephen King's *IT*, **Team HCC** unearths 10 more unmissable movies from the master of horror...

GERALD'S GAME

Published in 1992, King's thriller about a woman left handcuffed to a bed after her husband dies of a heart attack during a spot of bondage was widely seen as one of the author's lesser efforts. A pleasant surprise, then, that director Mike 'Oculus' Flanagan has been able to transform the story into a gripping psychological thrill-ride with his recent screen adaptation (one that's also loaded with Easter Eggs for eagle-eyed King fans). It also doesn't hurt that *Gerald's Game* gives actors Carla Gugino and Bruce Greenwood the chance to do some of their very best work in years.

Get it: Don't bother looking for *Gerald's Game* on disc just yet. Produced by Netflix, this superb adaptation was released exclusively on the streaming service last September.



TOP PICK

CARRIE

By far the best of the various screen adaptations of (and sequels to) King's debut novel, Brian de Palma's 1976 fright flick is a landmark of the horror genre. But for all of its flashy visuals and scares, what really gives the film so much power is Sissy Spacek's raw central performance.

Get it: Released late last year, Arrow Video's Limited Edition UK Blu-ray is undoubtedly the disc to hunt down, boasting a gorgeous new 4K restoration and plethora of bonus goodies (including a wonderful new commentary).



STAND BY ME

An early indication that there was more to King's oeuvre than simply trying to terrify us, director Rob Reiner's 1986 film (based on the author's 1982 novella *The Body*) is a touching, funny and offbeat coming-of-age story about four young boys who set off on a hike to find the body of missing child.

Get it: Released in 2011, Sony Pictures' 25th Anniversary Edition Blu-ray sports fine 1080p visuals and enjoyable extras (including a picture-in-picture commentary). A Zavvi-exclusive Steelbook variant was released in 2016.



THE DEAD ZONE

David Cronenberg directs this 1983 thriller about a school teacher (Christopher Walken) who wakes from a five-year coma with the ability to see visions of the future. Things come to a head when a meeting with a Presidential candidate (Martin Sheen) has him taking desperate measures to avert a nuclear war...

Get it: Incredibly, *The Dead Zone* has yet to be released on Blu-ray in the US or the UK. The good news is that there is a Region B Australian disc that also includes four featurettes and a chat-track.



PET SEMATARY

Arguably King's darkest and bleakest book, *Pet Sematary* made the leap to the silver screen in 1989 and, despite being every bit as shocking and ghoulish as the source material, turned out to be a surprise hit, taking more than \$57m at the US box office. A terrible sequel followed in 1992 and the filmmakers behind the latest version of *IT* have expressed a desire to reboot the story.

Get it: The 2012 US Blu-ray finally landed in the UK last year as part of the HMV-exclusive Premium Collection range.



CREEPSHOW

Written by King and directed by George A Romero, this 1982 anthology is basically a gloriously lurid love letter to the notorious EC horror comics of the 1950s. What it lacks in scares it makes up for with a heady mix of grisly gags and gloopy goo that all comes to a climax in an unforgettable story involving actor E.G. Marshall and thousands of cockroaches. None of which makes up for Stephen King's thespian talents though...

Get it: UK distributor Second Sight's 2013 Region B Blu-ray may be out-of-print, but is worth tracking down for its copious array of bonus goodies.



THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION

A flop on its cinema release in 1994, director Frank Darabont's prison drama went on to find a more appreciative audience on video and is now regularly cited as being one of the best films ever made. It's not, of course – but that's not to say that there isn't a lot to like about this extremely affecting and deftly handled bigscreen bromance.

Get it: With both UK Blu-rays released to date lacking lossless audio, fans might want to import the superior all-region Warner Bros. release from the US.



THE MIST

Frank Darabont's third Stephen King adaptation (from 2007) finds a group of people trapped in a supermarket by a strange mist populated by unspeakable monsters. Not only does this make for an awesome creature-feature, Darabont's film actually improves on King's novella with its reworked finale.

Get it: The UK two-disc Special Edition Blu-ray is the version to get hold of due to the inclusion of Darabont's preferred black-and-white presentation of the film alongside the colour original. You can pick it up for less than a tenner these days.



CHRISTINE

The definitive killer car movie, John Carpenter's 1983 frightfest finds Keith Gordon playing Arnie, a bullied teenager who buys a battered old 1958 Plymouth Fury and starts restoring the car to its original glory. Before long Arnie's life starts to change for the better – but woe betide anybody who gets on the wrong side of him or his murderous motor...

Get it: Indicator's all-region UK Blu-ray sports a rather spiffy 2.40:1 Full HD encode and plenty of extras – although you'll have to find the long out-of-print first pressing if you want the accompanying booklet.

THE SHINING

Stephen King made no bones over the years about his dislike of Stanley Kubrick's film adaptation of *The Shining* (oddly, his position has mellowed in accordance with the film's critical reappraisal). This is hardly surprising as the filmmaker dumped much of King's book and reshaped what was left into something much more puzzling, elusive and artful – albeit still capable of scaring its audience.

Get it: The European cut of *The Shining* has been released on Blu-ray in the UK several times, both as a standalone release and as part of the *Stanley Kubrick: Visionary Filmmaker* and *Stanley Kubrick: The Masterpiece Collection* boxsets. The 25-minute-longer US cut was finally released on Blu-ray here last October as part of the HMV-exclusive Premium Collection.



Have we missed one of your favourite Stephen King films?
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BLU-RAY PLAYERS Which deck rules the roost? **PROJECTORS** It's time to blow up your video!
AV RECEIVERS 5.1, 7.1, 11.2 – we've got all the options covered **SPEAKERS** Killer surround sound setups
for all rooms and budgets **PVRs** Including super-slim Freeview boxes and Sky Q **AND MORE!**



**LOOKING
FOR NEW
SPEAKERS?**
Our **Top 10**
guide is here
to help

HCC RATINGS KEY...

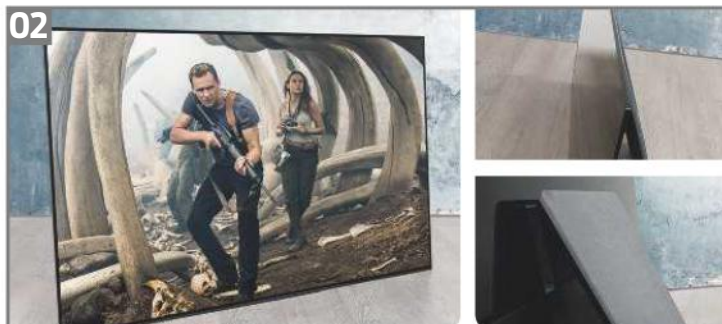
Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

TOP 10 Televisions

**Sony KD-65ZD9** → £3,500 ★★★★★

Sony finished 2016 on a high with this full-array LED Bravia (with advanced local dimming tech) that claims a 1,800-nit peak brightness. Cinematic, sublime pictures – and Dolby Vision support is a firmware update away. HCC #267

**Sony KD-55A1** → £3,500 ★★★★★

Another Sony set due a Dolby Vision upgrade later this year, this 55in OLED dazzles with its image quality (including superb motion processing), hidden Acoustic Surface speaker technology and eye-catching styling. HCC #275

**LG OLED65E7**

→ £5,000 ★★★★★

3D playback is dropped, but the E7 offers welcome picture improvements over last year's E6, particularly brightness and near-black talents. Supports Dolby Vision. HCC #274

**Panasonic TX-55EZ952**

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

A 55in OLED TV with an effortlessly naturalistic performance, although not as bright as some rivals. Gorgeous, understated design and premium build quality. HCC #277

**Philips 55POS9002**

→ £2,200 ★★★★★

Philips' second-gen Android-powered OLED takes a more refined approach to its processing, focusing on balanced cinematic imagery. Ambilight, as usual, boosts your immersion. HCC #276

**Samsung UE49MU7000**

→ £1,000 ★★★★★

Not one of Samsung's top-flight TVs, but a cracking mid-range 49in model that presents 4K and HD material with bright, rich colours and stable blacks. Good choice for an affordable setup. HCC #277

**Samsung QE65Q9F**

→ £4,900 ★★★★★

This premium 'QLED' screen outguns rivals when it comes to brightness and visual impact. Routinely stunning, but edge LED lighting has some niggles. Supports Samsung's HDR 10+ format. HCC #273

**Sony KD-55XE8596**

→ £1,100 ★★★★★

A real 4K bargain, combining a 55in screen with a solid picture performance. HDR doesn't zing due to a lack of sheer brightness, but it benefits from backlight stability. Impressive with regular HD, too. HCC #278

**Panasonic TX-65EX750**

→ £1,900 ★★★★★

A (surprise!) 3D-capable LED screen that offers well-controlled backlighting, pleasing 4K clarity and good HD upscaling. Not the brightest around, and some colour inconsistencies. HCC #279

**LG 55SJ850V**

→ £1,300 ★★★★★

Backlight distractions hinder this set's performance in low-lit rooms, but it's a strong all-rounder, offering Dolby Vision HDR, WebOS smarts, well-rounded sonics and a bargain price tag. HCC #276

TOP 5 Blu-ray movies

**War for the Planet of the Apes [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

The concluding part of Fox's trilogy hits 4K disc with a subtle Atmos mix and crisp, shadow-rich visuals. The movie itself is surprisingly intimate, with lead ape Caesar taking centre stage. ★★★★★

**Spider-Man: Homecoming [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

Peter Parker comes of age (with some help from Iron Man) in this winning mix of superhero action and John Hughes-style high school antics. Sony's UHD BD packs a Dolby Vision encode. ★★★★★

**The Handmaiden**

Park Chan-wook directs this lavish, sensual Korean-language period thriller, which arrives on Blu-ray with gorgeous Theatrical and Extended cuts and accomplished audio. A Q&A with Chan-wook is an extras highlight. ★★★★★

**Wonder Woman**

The highlight so far of the DC Extended Universe gives its heroine plenty of opportunity to shine in its WWI-era origin story, and the BD challenges your speaker setup with a wonderful Dolby Atmos soundmix. ★★★★★

**Dunkirk**

The soundmix here may be only a 'flat' 5.1 DTS-HD affair, but it's a masterclass in sonic engineering, crafting the tension in Chris Nolan's gorgeous-looking and refreshingly compact WW2 drama/thriller. ★★★★★

TOP 10 Blu-rays



01 Oppo UDP-203 → £650 ★★★★★

Oppo refreshes its player hardware with a superb universal design with Ultra HD playback (including Dolby Vision via firmware update). Packed with user adjustments and connectivity. No apps or Darbee processing, though. HCC #269



02 Oppo UDP-205 → £1,400 ★★★★★

This pricey, peerless UHD deck flaunts universal disc playback, asynchronous USB input, headphone amp and balanced stereo outs amongst its audiophile features. One for musos. HCC #274



03 Sony UBP-X800 → £270 ★★★★★

Sony embraces UHD Blu-ray with a full-width, sturdy design that'll also spin DVD-A and SACD platters. A great all-rounder, but no current Dolby Vision support or word on an update. HCC #274



04 Panasonic DMP-UB900 → £370 ★★★★★

The Ultra HD Blu-ray format got an inspiring debut in Panasonic's multi-talented deck that offers a sterling picture performance, 4K-enabled VOD apps and analogue audio outs. No DV. HCC #259



05 Cambridge Audio CXUHD → £800 ★★★★★

The lack of analogue outputs is a surprise considering CA's heritage, but this universal (and DV-capable) deck sounds sweet over its digital outs. As with Oppo's UDP-203, a MediaTek SoC is used. HCC #279



06 Panasonic DMP-UB700 → £300 ★★★★★

Shorn of some of the audiophile niceties of the UB900 (including multichannel analogue outputs), but still a safe pair of hands with your 4K BDs. And at a bargain price. HCC #270



07 Arcam FMJ UDP411 → £800 ★★★★★

Pristine visuals – including upscaled SD – and a classy sonic performance grant this Arcam instant appeal. The design and build is commensurate with the premium price tag. HCC #244



08 Panasonic DMP-UB300 → £130 ★★★★★

Great 4K imagery from this bargain deck, but you might prefer to up your budget for the UB700 – no split HDMI, optical/coaxial or Wi-Fi connections here. Half-size design for an easy install. HCC #272



09 Samsung UBD-K8500 → £180 ★★★★★

Debut Ultra HD Blu-ray player that finds fans courtesy of its sensible price point (now even lower), connected smarts and eye-catching visuals. Build quality is a little uninspiring. HCC #260



10 Samsung UBD-M9500 → £230 ★★★★★

Second-gen 4K player that adds features (mobile BD streaming, 360-degree image support) but removes 3D playback capability. As before, the chassis is curved. UHD discs look pin-sharp. HCC #275

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TOP 10 Projectors



01 Sony VPL-VW550ES → £9,000 ★★★★★

For its top-range domestic SXRD beamer, Sony introduces an HDR Contrast tool that proves useful in fine-tuning its UHD Blu-ray performance. Excels with standard BD content and setup flexibility, too. HCC #269



02 JVC DLA-X7000 → £5,700 ★★★★★

With contrast and brightness improvements over the more affordable DLA-X5000, this is a great bigscreen option, although its SDR playback impresses more than HDR. HCC #259



03 Sony VPL-HW45ES

→ £1,850 ★★★★★

The most affordable model in Sony's home cinema range, the Full HD-resolution 45ES features excellent light management for a routinely cinematic image. Great value. HCC #263



04 Optoma UHD60

→ £2,400 ★★★★★

An assured Ultra HD debut from Optoma – the UHD60 presents 4K Blu-rays with a pleasing contrast balance and lush detail. SDR-HDR conversion tool is best avoided, though. HCC #277



05 Optoma UHD65

→ £3,000 ★★★★★

4K DLP model that adds motion processing, enhanced colour response and a theatre-room friendly black chassis over Optoma's UHD60, but commands a more expensive price. HCC #278



06 Acer V7850

→ £2,700 ★★★★★

One rung below Acer's largescale V9800 4K debut sits this more affordable model. Again, black levels aren't its strong point, but this runs bright, sharp and super-quiet. HCC #276



07 Epson EH-TW6700

→ £1,300 ★★★★★

HDR and 4K scaling are off the menu, leaving this mid-range model to concentrate on cinematic HD images. Bright, crisp performance, plenty of tweaks, but no 12V trigger. HCC #271



08 Sony VPL-VW260ES

→ £5,200 ★★★★★

Sony's base-level 4K PJ comes with a few strings attached (brightness and colour range are limited), but it's a tempter for anyone spec'ing a UHD theatre. HCC #280



09 Epson EH-TW7300

→ £2,200 ★★★★★

Similar performance traits to its bigger EH-TW9300 sibling, but with reductions in max brightness (and claimed contrast). Currently the most affordable HDR model around. HCC #269



10 BenQ W2000

→ £800 ★★★★★

Average black-level performance limits this model's all-round appeal, but elsewhere this Full HD DLP budget PJ catches the eye with its calibration options and detailed visuals. HCC #257

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TOP 10 Speakers



01 **Monitor Audio Gold 300AV** →£7,150 ★★★★★
MA revamps its Gold Series and we pay serious attention. This big-ticket package excels across the frequency range, offers exquisite design and packs setup flexibility via the dipole/monopole FX surrounds. HCC #251



02 **Q Acoustics 3000 5.1 Cinema Pack** →£700 ★★★★★
A superior compact package with driver improvements over the previous 2000i series. The two-way cabinets and dual-driver sub combine to offer impressive audio for the money. HCC #247



03 **KEF R Series 7.1**
→£6,500 ★★★★★
A 7.1 set mixing dipolar and direct surrounds, this package takes its cues from KEF's Blade and offers faultless, largescale home cinema sonics. HCC #217



04 **KEF Q Series 5.1.2**
→£3,300 ★★★★★
KEF's revamped Q Series now offers Atmos modules for an up-to-the-minute sonic experience. Big, bold-looking speakers. Robust, immersive audio. HCC #280



05 **ATC HTS7 5.1**
→£3,500 ★★★★★
Brit brand ATC rejigs the driver tech and neutral sound of its SCM range into a wall-mountable, flexible system perfect for discreet AV setups. HCC #275



06 **ELAC Debut 5.1.2**
→£1,950 ★★★★★
Well-priced floorstanding Atmos system that manages to balance subtlety and precision with an exciting delivery. Subwoofer includes app-based room EQ. HCC #262



07 **Wharfedale Diamond 11 HCP** →£800 ★★★★★
Bookshelf speakers and 10in sub combine in a system that offers mid-range and treble finesse and a healthy dollop of boisterous bass. Fun and affordable. HCC #279



08 **DALI Opticon 5.1**
→£3,200 ★★★★★
The Opticons employ driver designs from DALI's high-end models, and showcase a talent for involving music presentation and thrilling home cinema. HCC #260



09 **Polk Signature Series 5.1**
→£1,450 ★★★★★
Largescale performance from a well-priced floorstanding system with slimmed-down centre enclosure. Upfront and boisterous sound; a great entertainer. HCC #273



10 **Focal Sib Evo Dolby Atmos 5.1.2** →£1,200 ★★★★★
Enjoyable-sounding and well-priced sub/sat system with Atmos upfiring in front L/R enclosures. Not the smallest 'satellite' speakers around. HCC #276

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Photo courtesy of Gary J.Fernandez.

TOP 10 AV Receivers/AV Processors

01



Denon AVR-X6400H → £2,100 ★★★★★

This receiver's 11 channels of power are joined by Atmos, DTS:X and integrated Auro-3D, plus HEOS multiroom integration, making it peerlessly flexible. Sound delivery is quick-footed and articulate. A superb one-box solution. HCC #280

02



Arcam AVR850 → £4,500 ★★★★★

High-end seven-channel AVR marrying Class G amplification and Atmos (and future DTS:X) support with talented Dirac Live Room EQ. 11-channel pre-outs for full-fat setups. HCC #257

03



Anthem MRX 1120
→ £4,000 ★★★★★

Combining Anthem's superb ARC room EQ system with 11-channel amplification makes this an essential consideration for full-spec Atmos setups. Muscular, precise sound. But no networking skills. HCC #265

04



Marantz NR1608
→ £600 ★★★★★

With a smoother sound signature than before and the addition of HEOS multiroom, Marantz's 7.1-channel slim-line AVR flies the flag for living-room friendly AV. Only one HDMI out, though. HCC #278

05



Sony STR-DN1080
→ £550 ★★★★★

Sony is back in the AVR game with a first Atmos model that adds worthy phantom rear speaker processing to its 5.1.2 sonics. A few UI niggles don't take much of the shine off an impressive budget buy. HCC #277

06



Denon AVR-X4300H
→ £1,300 ★★★★★

Nine-channel receiver with HEOS multiroom integration and 11-channel processing (Atmos, DTS:X, plus Auro-3D as a paid-for upgrade). Great, detailed sound and foolproof usability. HCC #267

07



Yamaha RX-A3060
→ £2,000 ★★★★★

New nine-channel flagship from Yamaha features excellent room EQ implementation, well-judged DSP modes, and an even-handed, effortless sound. HCC #264

08



Pioneer VSX-1131
→ £550 ★★★★★

Seven-channel model with Atmos and DTS:X support that features an overhauled remote control and UI to improve usability. Bass-rich, energetic sound. HCC #265

09



Yamaha RX-A860
→ £900 ★★★★★

Only seven channels and hindered by only three HDCP 2.2-enabled HDMI inputs, but beyond that this flexible MusicCast AVR proves a great listen, with plenty of DSP toys. HCC #270

10



Denon HEOS AVR
→ £800 ★★★★★

Able to run wireless rears/sub (using HEOS models) and sporting a display-free design, this is a five-channel AVR with a different approach. One for HEOS devotees only. HCC #276

TOP 5 Bonus features



Sam Peckinpah: Man of Iron – The Director's Cut

Arrow Video bolsters its *Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia*: Limited Edition Blu-ray with over 10 hours of extended interviews shot for Paul Joyce's fascinating TV doc about the film's director. ★★★★★



Master Class: Ridley Scott

Not as extensive as previous *Making of...* docs accompanying Scott's movies, but this 56-minute feature joining *Alien: Covenant* is well worth a watch, with a strong focus on SFX and creature design. ★★★★★



The Gorgon

Accompanying the Peter Cushing/Christopher Lee flick in Indicator's *Hammer: Volume One - Fear Warning!* boxset is a reproduction of its 1977 *House of Hammer* comic book adaptation. Read it and shriek... ★★★★★



Impressions: A Journey Behind the Scenes of Twin Peaks

Twin Peaks fans can delve deep into the recent series' production with this 291-minute fly-on-the-wall *Making of...* doc that gets its own BD platter. ★★★★★



It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World: Extended Cut

Not quite the original theatrical Cinerama version (202 minutes, now lost) but a 198-minute cut put together from numerous sources. A labour of love that varies in image quality. ★★★★★

TOP 10 Subwoofers



01 SVS SB-2000 → £600 ★★★★★

This follow up to the SB-1000 offers immense value for money. A mid-sized woofer that imbibes Blu-rays with quick, taut and potent LFE, it's a perfect introduction to what a truly good sub can accomplish. *HCC #233*



02 REL No.25 → £6,500 ★★★★★

REL celebrates its 25th anniversary in style with this 15in/1,000W premium concoction that exhibits exhilarating speed and nuance down to serious depths. Big, but beautiful. *HCC #271*



03 Bowers & Wilkins DB1D

→ £3,750 ★★★★★

This sequel to the DB1 moves EQ to an app and changes driver/amp design. Beautifully controlled performance with depth and detail. Gorgeous bodywork. *HCC #277*



04 JL Audio Fathom f212v2

→ £6,500 ★★★★★

A second outing for JL's 2 x 12in monster, with an increase in power (3,600W) and room EQ improvements among the changes. Sounds as good as you'd imagine. *HCC #261*



05 SVS SB16-Ultra

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

A 16in driver and 1,500W amp combine to give SVS's flagship sealed sub real appeal. Goes low but remains tight and fast. App-assisted EQ and operation. *HCC #270*



06 REL T7i

→ £850 ★★★★★

Easy to house 8in sub (with 10in passive driver). Decent LF extension joined by superb speed. Wireless transmission via optional (£200) system. *HCC #277*



07 BK Electronics P12-300SB-DF

→ £475 ★★★★★

Bass heads can get outrageous value for money in the shape of BK's overperforming 12in sub. A front-firing model is also offered. *HCC #247*



08 Eclipse TD520SW

→ £3,000 ★★★★★

This twin 8in woofer, driven by ICEpower amplification, aims for ultimate speed and tone – and succeeds. Worth every penny of its asking price. *HCC #249*



09 GoldenEar SuperSub X

→ £1,450 ★★★★★

Four drivers squeezed into a relatively compact design and given plenty of push from a 1,400W amp. Standout traits are impact and depth. *HCC #272*



10 SVS PC-2000

→ £800 ★★★★★

Cylinder construction means this 12in, 500W design can boast a large cabinet but a relatively small footprint. Good value with weighty, slamming bass. *HCC #267*

TOP 5 Console games



Uncharted: Lost Legacy

The Drake brothers are replaced by two new heroines in the latest instalment of Sony's PlayStation puzzler. The open-world element hides the relatively short nature of its story mode; HDR visuals are stunning.

★★★★★



Resident Evil 7: Biohazard

Moving from the familiar third-person perspective to a first-person view was always going to be a risk, but it pays off here with a terrifying return to the series' roots. PS4 Pro owners get enhanced resolution visuals.

★★★★★



Prey

Bethesda's FPS (and reboot of the popular 2006 title) refreshes the genre with inanimate-object-mimicking monsters, and offers plenty of gameplay variety. Good-looking, but 4K is limited to PC-based setups.

★★★★★



Super Mario Odyssey

Mario returns in this standout title for Nintendo's Switch console that endows its platforming fun with superior game mechanics, eye-popping visuals and a foot-tapping score. A genuine masterpiece.

★★★★★



Injustice 2

Brilliant follow up to the 2013 superhero beat-'em-up classic, letting you dole out a good kicking to the bad guys while playing as DC Comics legends. Advanced resolution via PS4, plus HDR, too.

★★★★★

TOP 10 Accessories



01 KEF R50 → £600 ★★★★★

KEF's Dolby Atmos-enabled reflective modules are a smart choice to beef up a system. Using the company's Uni-Q point source drivers pays dividends, enabling full-range sonics that reach deep into your cinema room. First-rate build. *HCC #252*



02 Yamaha WX-AD10 → £150 ★★★★★

Simple to use, unobtrusive add-on that brings MusicCast multiroom/hi-res streaming to legacy AV gear via 3.5mm/phono. Not a bad price – only available in grey, unfortunately. *HCC #274*



03 Amazon Echo Dot

→ £50 ★★★★★

Less impressive as a standalone speaker than its larger sibling, but more affordable. Use its 3.5mm output and Bluetooth to pair with third-party kit. Fun AI experience. A real bargain. *HCC #269*



04 Nvidia Shield Android TV

→ £180 ★★★★★

The Android-based streamer/gaming box gets a gentle revamp – same silicon, neater design, new features including future support for Google Assistant. Slick and easy to use. *HCC #272*



05 Amazon Fire TV (2017)

→ £70 ★★★★★

HDR playback has been added to Amazon's great-value media streamer, although the absence of an Ethernet port does niggle considering its 4K talents. Oodles of content. *HCC #280*



06 Logitech Harmony Elite

→ £270 ★★★★★

Flexible and relatively easy to set up, this all-in-one remote package combines touchscreen handset and hub with smart device app. Worthwhile if you have a stacked kit rack. *HCC #256*



07 Devolo Wi-Fi ac Repeater

→ £50 ★★★★★

Simple plug-based add-on that extends the range of your Wi-Fi network, and offers hardwired access. Could be just the ticket for your loft-based movie room. *HCC #269*



08 Naim Uniti Atom

→ £1,900 ★★★★★

Naim's gorgeous Uniti Atom combines DAC, 2 x 40W amp and network/wireless streaming for an audiophile hub. Get this HDMI upgrade model to add your flatscreen TV to the action. *HCC #278*



09 PSB Imagine XA

→ £350 ★★★★★

These two-way Dolby Atmos-enabled upfiring speakers are fairly chunky, but work well at creating a height layer and the £350-per-pair ticket makes them an enticing option. *HCC #264*



10 Xbox One X

→ £450 ★★★★★

The most advanced games console on the planet dazzles with its native 4K HDR gaming chops, but the price tag is hefty and heavyweight users may wish it came with more than 1TB of storage. *HCC #280*

TOP 5 Blu-ray/DVD boxsets



Legion: The Complete Season One

Brilliantly written and beautifully acted, this X-Men spin-off series is cinematic in a way that only a handful of other TV shows have ever managed – and it shines on this BD set. ★★★★★



The Wonderful Worlds of Ray Harryhausen: Vol. Two

Another trio of vintage fantasy/sci-fi flicks in a sumptuous package from Indicator. Here it's *Mysterious Island*, *Jason and The Argonauts* and *First Men in the Moon* given the deluxe treatment. ★★★★★



Transformers: 5-Movie Collection [Ultra HD]

Paramount has revisited its mechanical mayhem franchise to ensure all flicks now feature 4K visuals and Dolby Atmos soundmixes. Just the ticket for a full-on movie marathon. ★★★★★



Spider-Man: Legacy Boxset [Ultra HD]

Sam Raimi's trilogy and the more recent *Amazing...* reboot movies are united in a boxset that impresses with its AV chops, surfeit of bonus bits and fan-pleasing packaging. ★★★★★



Twin Peaks: A Limited Event Series

David Lynch's smallscreen return may not be quite what some *Twin Peaks* fans were expecting, but it remains a wonderfully weird and hypnotic 18-episode show on a brilliant BD boxset. ★★★★★

TOP 10 Soundbars & Soundbases



01 Yamaha YSP-5600SW →£1,900 ★★★★★
With its 46 drivers (including upfiring) this premium 'bar delivers precisely-steered and immersive audio, even of the Atmos variety. Potent wireless sub and 4K-capable HDMI switching sweeten the high-end deal. *HCC #254*



02 Canton DM55 →£330 ★★★★★
Canton's smallest soundbase still delivers big sonic thrills. Twin woofers underpin clean and crisp mids and highs, and build quality is first-rate. Doddle to use. Bluetooth built-in. *HCC #260*



03 Samsung HW-K950 →£1,300 ★★★★★
Soundbar with additional wireless rears and Dolby Atmos support via four upfiring drivers. Impressively largescale performance, good connectivity. No native DTS support. *HCC #263*



04 Samsung HW-MS750 / SWA-W700 →£700/£600 ★★★★★
Upfiring drivers on this premium 'bar, but no Atmos decoding. Performance still dazzles, and the optional sub shows its merits with movie soundmixes. *HCC #278*



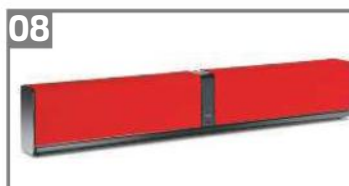
05 Sony HT-ST5000 →£1,500 ★★★★★
High-end Dolby Atmos-capable soundbar/sub. Upfiring elevate the soundstage (but don't wraparound). Sound quality overall is excellent, blending muscle and depth with musicality. *HCC #275*



06 Cabasse Stream BAR →£850 ★★★★★
Soundbar/hi-res speaker that's blessed with real musicality, but doesn't fall short when it comes to energetic film soundtracks. HDMI in/out, but v1.4 only. *HCC #269*



07 Q Acoustics M3 →£300 ★★★★★
A 4in x 6in woofer is tucked away in the M3's eye-catching angular chassis, ensuring this well-priced soundbar has a full-range performance. Simple to use. Bluetooth streaming. *HCC #271*



08 DALI Kubik One →£800 ★★★★★
The Danish speaker brand brings a slice of glamour to your setup with this stylish soundbar. No HDMI or digital decoding but it packs a tight, lively and nuanced sound. *HCC #269*



09 Q Acoustics M2 →£300 ★★★★★
Easily accommodated in/on AV furniture, and packing HDMI ARC for a simple hookup, this BMR-driver/ built-in woofer soundbase impresses with its energetic delivery and price. *HCC #279*



10 Sonos Playbase →£700 ★★★★★
Although this features the same foibles as the Sonos Playbar (no Bluetooth, no HDMI, no DTS), this multiroom maestro looks good and sounds good. Detailed, with naturalistic bass. *HCC #273*

TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays



Carrie: Limited Edition
A plethora of exclusive extras and a remarkable 1080p image (based on a 4K scan of the original camera negatives) make this the definitive release of the Stephen King/Brian de Palma horror classic. ★★★★★



Close Encounters of the Third Kind [Ultra HD Blu-ray]
The extras may be reserved for a pricier boxset, but fans of Spielberg's classic sci-fi will dig the authentic image quality of Sony Pictures' UHD release. ★★★★★



The Wages of Fear
Few movies deliver as much edge-of-seat suspense as this 1953 thriller (based upon the same novel as William Friedkin's 1977 flick *Sorcerer*). Here it looks resplendent in monochrome 1080p. Quality extras, too. ★★★★★



The Thing
Another Blu-ray outing for John Carpenter's horror masterpiece, this time with a collection of new bonus features and upgraded 1080p visuals (from a new 4K scan of the original 35mm camera negatives). ★★★★★



King Kong [Ultra HD Blu-ray]
The big ape looks beautiful on this HDR upgrade of Peter Jackson's 2005 epic, while audio moves from DTS-HD 5.1 to DTS:X for an expansive experience. Heaps of bonus material. ★★★★★

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE...

to getting the best possible sound
from your hi-fi, whether you're
buying, tuning or tweaking



TOP 5 PVRs



Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription

This triple-tuner PVR offers recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and smart TiVo functionality. If you're in a cable area, consider it

★★★★★



Sky Q, £subscription

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzles with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content

★★★★★



Humax FVP-5000T

Revamped menus, faster operation and tweaks to its triple-tuner engine make this the most advanced Freeview Play PVR around – and it doubles admirably as a DLNA player/media jukebox. 500GB/1TB/2TB

★★★★★



Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★



EE TV Smart Box £subscription

This quad-tuner 1TB PVR, from the mobile/broadband corp, offers innovative Replay 24-hour channel recording and great Smart device streaming. Needs more catch-up though

★★★★★

TOP 5 Headphones



Sony MDR-HW700DS, £800

Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late-night listening

★★★★★



Sony MDR-1000X, £360

Superior noise-cancelling cans with hi-res audio support via Sony's LDAC wireless transmission tech. Slick, touch-sensitive operation and healthy battery life. Fulsome sound and comfy to wear

★★★★★



1More MK802, £150

Ignore the bling-tastic blue or red finishes and focus on the assured sound performance from these well-priced closed-back cans. Features include wireless Bluetooth and app control (with burn-in mode). Great value

★★★★★



PSB M4U1, £220

Aimed at both home and on-the-move use (and supplied with a carry case and two cable options), the M4U1s offer solid bass response and impactful highs. Build quality is good, as is comfort

★★★★★

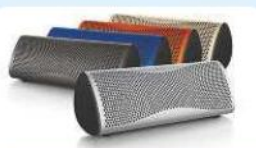


Audio Technica ATH-SR9, £400

45mm drivers and Audio Technica's Midpoint Mount tech deliver wide, deep, spacious sonics. Memory foam padding aids listener comfort; 3m cable should suit most AV setups.

★★★★★

TOP 5 Wireless speakers



KEF Muo, £300

Portable Bluetooth speaker that's a cut above much of the competition. KEF's sonic knowhow results in a punchy, dynamic presentation that cherishes lossless rips. Excellent build quality

★★★★★



Sony SRS-X11, £60

An affordable palm-sized Bluetooth speaker with internal rechargeable battery, Sony's SRS-X11 is supremely portable and sounds decent for the money. A neat little gizmo. Get two and they can work in stereo

★★★★★



Q Acoustics BT3, £280

Bluetooth stereo pair with optical input makes a good alternative to a soundbar (there's even a subwoofer pre-out) while remaining a dab hand at music. Neat and tidy design, good price

★★★★★



Simple Audio Listen, £400

Desktop stereo speakers with Bluetooth support, these benefit from separate tweeter/midbass units and a classy construction. Performance is well-balanced, and a subwoofer output is offered for extra bass

★★★★★



Denon HEOS 5 HS2, £350

The mid-range multiroom speaker gets a second-gen revamp, adding welcome hi-res audio playback and Bluetooth connectivity. Gorgeous looks, boisterous, room-filling sound

★★★★★

HOME CINEMA Choice

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CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER

BOX OFFICE

SCREENS 1-4



AV Avenger

Netflix has scored big with fantasy-fest *Bright* – but the implications for traditional cinemagoers could be huge, speculates **Steve May**

BRIGHT, THE NETFLIX original movie starring Will Smith as a foul-mouthed cop partnered with an idealistic Orc, has been a huge success for the streaming colossus – at least by any metric that counts for a streaming service. The fantasy flick racked up an audience of 11 million in just three days when it was released back in December, according to ratings wrangler Nielsen.

Hollywood bible *Variety* extrapolated, based on average US ticket prices, that *Bright* effectively 'opened' with a boffo \$100m box office weekend. That's on par with *The Fate of the Furious*. Of course, the comparison doesn't actually compute in the real world, not least because Netflix subscribers don't need to pony up additional dollars to watch the feature – let alone commit to overpriced snacks.

Bright stands out from other Netflix originals as the most pointedly commercial of all its movie projects. Progenitor *Beasts of No Nation* was an obvious awards contender, commissioned back when Netflix was seeking critical validation. *Bright* is unapologetic popcorn fodder.

The fantastical buddy cop movie reportedly cost north of \$90m, and the money is self-evidently on screen. **The production design and visual effects are top notch** – available in 4K HDR, it looks superb and has a great multichannel soundtrack.

For what it's worth, I enjoyed this entertaining mash of tropes and Tinkerbell trappings (a *Bright* is someone who can wield a magic wand, something everyone wants control of). Directed by David Ayer, the film effortlessly hits all the right action beats. There are echoes of Walter Hill's *The Warriors*, riffs on Smith's own *Bad Boys* outings, and an unambiguous nod to *Alien Nation*, albeit one that doesn't make a meal of its social allegories.

Of course, its audience figure is a best-guess estimate, given that Netflix doesn't actually reveal ratings, and Nielsen's SVOD measurement service is a bit of an (admittedly ingenious) cludge.

To put the number in context, Season 2 of hit fantasy/sci-fi series *Stranger Things* is said to have averaged around 15.8m viewers per episode over the same period, according to Nielsen, while the season premiere of *The Crown Season 2* pulled in around three million viewers. Netflix disputes all these figures.

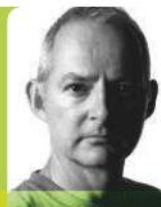
Nielsen extracts its data from a ratings panel of around 40,000 US households, but doesn't just simply ask what they've been watching. Instead, the company uses what it describes as an 'audio-based content recognition' system to track streaming views. Measuring equipment uses Shazam-like audio recognition to determine what's being watched.

This wizardry only works on content viewed on TV sets, though, not material streamed via other devices. It doesn't include mobile and PC-based views, which still represent a huge chunk of Netflix's core audience. And as it only takes into account US households, it doesn't indicate a wider global reach or reflect tastes in other territories. Inevitably, the multi-territory tally is going to be much higher.

But there is a more seismic ramification to *Bright*'s success. The film signals a shift from Hollywood majors being the sole purveyors of franchise blockbusters. If Netflix (and inevitably Amazon) mount an offensive to take ownership of the tentpole film market, where does that leave traditional studios? Floundering, that's where. And that in turn has huge implications for their traditional physical media/Blu-ray businesses... ■

What's your view on big-budget movies bypassing cinemas altogether? Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com

Steve May is glad there isn't an 'audio recognition system' in his den, as it would pick up the sounds of him continually arguing with his AVR





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